

**CASTE MUST GO**  
**AND**  
**THE SIN OF UNTOUCHABILITY**

BY  
**M. K. GANDHI**



**NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE**  
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AND  
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**BY  
M. K. GANDHI**

**Compiled by  
R. K. PRABHU**



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**CASTE MUST GO**

## TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

M. K. GANDHI

*Harijan*, 29-4-1933, p. 2



## CHAPTER 1

# CASTE MUST GO

## I

I gladly publish Sir Govindrao Madgavkar's open letter.\* My own position has been often stated in these columns. It may be summed up as follows:

1. I believe in Varnashrama of the Vedas which, in my opinion, is based on absolute equality of status, notwithstanding passages to the contrary in the Smritis and elsewhere.

2. Every word of the printed works passing muster as Shastras is not, in my opinion, a revelation.

3. The interpretation of accepted texts has undergone evolution and is capable of indefinite evolution, even as the human intellect and heart are.

4. Nothing in the Shastras which is manifestly contrary to universal truths and morals can stand.

5. Nothing in the Shastras which is capable of being reasoned can stand if it is in conflict with reason.

6. Varnashrama of the Shastras is today non-existent in practice.

7. The present caste system is the very antithesis of Varnashrama. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better.

8. In Varnashrama there was and should be no prohibition of intermarriage or interdining.

---

\*The letter is given at the end of this article

Prohibition there is of change of one's hereditary occupation for purposes of gain. The existing practice is therefore doubly wrong in that it has set up cruel restrictions about interdining and intermarriage and tolerates anarchy about choice of occupation.

9. Though there is in Varnashrama no prohibition against intermarriage and interdining, there can be no compulsion. It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine. If the law of Varnashrama was observed, there would naturally be a tendency, so far as marriage is concerned, for people to restrict the marital relations to their own Varna.

10. As I have repeatedly said there is no such thing as untouchability by birth in the Shastras. I hold the present practice to be a sin and the greatest blot on Hinduism. I feel more than ever that if untouchability lives, Hinduism dies.

11. The most effective, quickest and the most unobtrusive way to destroy caste is for reformers to begin the practice with themselves and, where necessary, take the consequences of social boycott. The reform will not come by reviling the orthodox. The change will be gradual and imperceptible. The so-called higher classes will have to descend from their pedestal before they can make any impression upon the so-called lower classes. Day-to-day experience of village work shows how difficult the task is of bridging the gulf that exists between the city-dwellers and the villagers, the higher classes and the lower classes. The two are not synonymous terms. For the class distinction exists both in the cities and the villages.

SIR G. MADGAVKAR'S OPEN LETTER  
TO MAHATMA GANDHI

To The Editor, *Harijan*

Sir,

The recent announcement of Dr. Ambedkar that he will not die a Hindu has caused a flutter in the dovecots. Whether he emerges a President of the Mahasabha or a convert to some other creed is a matter in which the average Hindu has no say and may not hazard opinion or counsel. He may at the most regret, understanding and sympathizing with his attitude of revolt and bitterness, yet certain and thankful that Hinduism will survive and might even, from some points of view, gain by his secession.

From the days of Ram Mohan Roy and Dayananda Saraswati liberal and far-sighted Hindu leaders on this side such as Bhandarkar, Ranade and Gokhale have been inviting the attention of Hindus to the weaknesses of the caste system, of which untouchability is an extreme form, and have been pressing us to set our own house in order. The various Samajas and Missions such as the Depressed Classes Mission in Poona and now the Harijan Movement of Mahatma Gandhi have been doing their best. But Rome was not built in a day. We are dealing with an institution centuries old with a conservative, superstitious and vast community, illiterate as far as the women and the masses are concerned. The attitude of Government was in theory a benevolent, in practice, a futile neutrality. And with the increased poverty and struggle for existence and competition for posts under Government, the administrative and statutory recognition of the backward castes, combined with separate electorates, has rendered the work of the social reformer ever more difficult than before.

In a recent address in London Sir Stanley Reed—like Gokhale and others before him—suggested “too late” as an appropriate motto for the British Government in India in regard to



political reforms. As one of the oldest members of the Presidency Social Reform Association, I fear I must make the same admission in regard to the attitude of us Hindus to social reform. We refuse to face the question fairly and squarely. We shirk to give a plain answer and to act upon it. We take refuge in phrases and quibbles and subtleties, which serve to exasperate rather than to solve. An outburst, and we act like frightened sheep—an unedifying and a humiliating attitude for any self-respecting community. And we have even less excuse than our rulers, since no material interests are involved but, at the most, empty pride. In one very real sense, economically and politically, we are all of us equally depressed. But the poorer and the weaker we grow, the more we display, failing aught else, pride of caste.

The plain issue before us Hindus is, I submit, whether today we are or are not in favour of social intercourse and above all, of intermarriage between all castes of Hindus, including the untouchables. On this vital question only one of two positions is consistent and possible. One position is to accept caste as a divine and a sacrosanct institution, above and beyond the pale of worldly considerations. And no benefits, whether eugenic or social, economic or political, from intermarriage can be allowed to affect the maintenance and the permanence of caste. As in the theory of Hindu Law, orthodoxy may concede that only four castes and the untouchables should exist. But since it is impossible in practice to go back to these five only, the concession is more apparent than real and somewhat on a par with Mr. Winston Churchill's ingenious distinction between Dominion Status with, and one without, power or functions or Sir Malcolm Hailey's between Self-government and Responsible Government.

This is in fact the Sanatanist position and answer. It ignores the fact pointed out by scholars, such as Bhandarkar, that the most ancient Vedas give no countenance to untouchability and allow intermarriage between castes which were a later growth. It overlooks the fact that, whatever its origin, today caste does not

correspond and is not related with economic realities such as division of labour or, in some cases, even with real culture and caste-marks on the forehead might show the sanctimonious Pharisee. They are no evidence of the qualities with which, according to a verse in the Bhagavadgita possibly interpolated, the four castes were created, any more than the voluminous turban is evidence of the Kshatriya and his valour.

The other position is that of the social reformer, who is not ashamed either of the name or his convictions and of their logical consequence. Whatever its origin and its growth, caste is a human institution which has existed in other countries and has been modified by human agency, conscious and unconscious. In India, on the contrary, it has grown to monstrous dimensions, undreamt of elsewhere. It divides and weakens Hindus and, like a cancerous growth, absorbs all the vital forces to itself at the expense of the community.

The Joint Select Parliamentary Committee has, and with some justice, characterized caste as "inconsistent with democratic principles". But even today the public utterances of leading Hindus on this point are not quite clear any more than the attitude of the Congress or the Mahasabha. I do not belong to either organization and have no pretensions to lead. But I am and have been clear in favour of intermarriage. As to untouchability, in 1932 when I presided at a public meeting of the Gaud Saraswat Brahmanas of Bombay, which, with only two dissentients and by a majority of nearly 1,200, carried a resolution in favour of throwing open the caste temples to Harijans, I observed: "I cannot conceive how God can impose upon the Hindu community so absurd and suicidal a law that an untouchable so remains only as long as he remains a Hindu, but becomes touchable the moment he leaves the Hindu fold." And in January 1935 at the annual meeting of the Hindu Law Reform Association I said: "The real question we have to face is whether we are or are not prepared to throw caste overboard and purge ourselves of its spirit as a



disease, which weakens, has ruined and will kill, or whether we shall continue to believe that it is a holy and a healthy institution, cherishing it and taking it to our bosom. Is it wise or consistent or just for the Maratha to abuse the Brahmana and then to assault the untouchable for pretence to equality? Granting that caste will not disappear in a day, its practical extinction and the speed with which it will die rest with ourselves." Other countries and communities exist and have progressed without caste and so can Hindus. The Heavens will not fall with it.

For the root evil, the appalling poverty whether of the cultivator or of the untouchable, the solutions must be economic and political. But equality in the sight of the law already exists. Equal opportunity of education in schools, maintained by public funds, can and should be conceded, whatever the objections of the orthodox. But even here and in regard to the use of wells, the prejudice and resistance exist mainly in the villages and on the part of non-Brahmanas, such as Patidars in Gujarat, Marathas in Maharashtra and Lingayats in Karnatak. And as a police force in each village to enforce equality is not practical, the only alternative just at present would appear to be that the touchables in any village who object to the use of their wells by the untouchables, should be made by law to provide for a proper separate well for the untouchables. And as to temple entry, I would suggest, in the case of public temples, early legislation, throwing them open to all Hindus including untouchables on a perfect footing of equality, over-riding any custom or trust, express or implied, prohibiting any section of Hindus from entry to the main building as distinguished from the inner shrine, reserved for the worshipping priest.

But I must also point out that the untouchables, not less than the non-Brahmanas and Brahmanas are, like all Hindus, tarred with the same brush and observe caste as rigorously among themselves, as, for instance, the Dheds and the Bhangis in Gujarat, and the Mahars, the Chamars and the Mangs in Maharashtra.



The question for the untouchables is, therefore, the same, and it behoves their leaders, while pressing for equality, not merely to abuse the caste Hindus but also to encourage intermarriage and social reform among themselves. Lastly, I would remark that legislation may forbid or permit but cannot impose social intercourse or intermarriage. These must grow out of equal standards, culture and sympathy and work in common ideals, rather than from abuse or political motives.

I would appeal to Hindu leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Malaviya, Mr. N. C. Kelkar, Mr. B. V. Jadhav and the Hon. Dewan Bahadur Kambli to give us a clear and a courageous lead on this vital question. It is with the hope of eliciting such a lead that I am trespassing on your space.

I am etc.,  
G. D. Madgavkar

Koregaon Park, Poona,

November 5, 1935

*Harijan*, 16-11-1935, pp. 316-18

## II

The views expressed by me in the article "Caste Must Go" have been often expressed in these columns though under different headings. Moreover, the article does not deal with the relations between caste Hindus and Harijan Hindus. It deals with reform only among castemen or Savarnas. When untouchability goes, 'untouchables' will occupy precisely the same position as castemen. And whatever rule or custom then governs castemen will govern Harijans who are no longer Harijans. If, therefore, caste remains as it is now, there will be no intermarriage and no interdining between Harijans and castemen. But if caste goes in its present form, as it will some day, there will most undoubtedly be intermarriage and

interdining between Harijans and castemen as there will be between castemen and castemen. And if Varna remains, as I hope it will, occupations will be restricted as they were in the past, intermarriage and interdining will not be restricted even as they were not in the past. Whatever happens, it will happen not because of the activity of the Harijan Sevak Sangh as a body, but because of other forces which the Sangh can neither regulate nor control. Its members as individuals will no doubt take their due share in moulding those forces according to their predilections.

*Harijan*, 30-11-1935, p. 332

## CHAPTER 2

### CASTE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH RELIGION

Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. Varna and Ashrama are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of Varna teaches us that we have, each one of us, to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful, and absolutely equal in status. The callings of a Brahmana—spiritual teacher—and a scavenger are equal, and their due performance carries

equal merit before God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man. Both were entitled to their livelihood and no more. Indeed one traces even now in the villages the faint lines of this healthy operation of the law. Living in Segaon with its population of 600, I do not find a great disparity between the earnings of different tradesmen including Brahmanas. I find too that real Brahmanas are to be found even in these degenerate days who are living on alms freely given to them and are giving freely of what they have of spiritual treasures. It would be wrong and improper to judge the law of Varna by its caricature in the lives of men who profess to belong to a Varna whilst they openly commit a breach of its only operative rule. Arrogation of a superior status by any of the Varna over another is a denial of the law. And there is nothing in the law of Varna to warrant a belief in untouchability. (The essence of Hinduism is contained in its enunciation of one and only God as Truth and its bold acceptance of Ahimsa as the law of the human family.)

I am aware that my interpretation of Hinduism will be disputed by many besides Dr. Ambedkar. That does not affect my position. It is an interpretation by which I have lived for nearly half a century and according to which I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to regulate my life.

In my opinion the profound mistake that Dr. Ambedkar has made in his address is to pick out the texts of doubtful authenticity and value, and the state of degraded Hindus who are no fit specimens of the faith they so woefully misrepresent. Judged by the standard applied by Dr. Ambedkar, every known living faith will probably fail.



In his able address, the learned Doctor has overproved his case. Can a religion that was professed by Chaitanya, Jnanadeva, Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Vivekananda and a host of others who might be easily mentioned, be so utterly devoid of merit as is made out in Dr. Ambedkar's address? A religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. For that and that alone can be used as the standard to aspire to, if not to improve upon.

*Harijan*, 18-7-1936, p. 180

### CHAPTER 3

## RELIGION DEGRADED

It is not caste that has made us what we are. It was our greed and disregard of essential virtues which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration. But like every other institution it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. The innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better. The silent destruction and reconstruction of sub-castes have ever gone on and are bound to continue. Social pressure and public opinion can be trusted to deal with the problem. But I am certainly against any attempt at destroying the fundamental divisions. The caste system is not based on inequality, there is no question of inferiority, and so far as there is any such question arising, the tendency should undoubtedly be checked. But there

appears to be no valid reason for ending the system because of its abuse. It lends itself easily to reformation. The spirit of democracy, which is fast spreading throughout India and the rest of the world, will, without a shadow of doubt, purge the institution of the idea of predominance and subordination. The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires change of the heart. If caste is a bar to the spread of that spirit the existence of five religions in India—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism—is equally a bar.

The spirit of democracy requires the inculcation of the spirit of brotherhood, and I can find no difficulty in considering a Christian or a Mahomedan to be my brother in absolutely the same sense as a blood brother, and Hinduism that is responsible for the doctrine of the caste is also responsible for the inculcation of the essential brotherhood, not merely of man but even of all that lives.

*Young India*, 8-12-1920, p. 3

From the economic point of view, its value was once very great. It ensured hereditary skill; it limited competition. It was the best remedy against pauperism. And it had all the advantages of trade guilds. Although it did not foster adventure or invention there, it is not known to have come in the way either.

Historically speaking, caste may be regarded as man's experiment or social adjustment in the laboratory of Indian society. If we can prove it to be a success, it can be offered to the world as a leaven and as the best remedy against heartless competition and social disintegration born of avarice and greed.

*Young India*, 5-1-1921, p. 2

In the name of religion we Hindus have made a fetish of outward observances, and have degraded religion by making it simply a question of eating and drinking. Brahmanism owes its unrivalled position to its self-abnegation, its inward purity, its severe austerity, all these illumined by knowledge. Hindus are doomed if they attach undue importance to the spiritual effects of foods and human contacts. Placed as we are in the midst of trials and temptations from within, and touched and polluted as we are by the most untouchable and the vilest thought currents, let us not, in our arrogance, exaggerate the influence of contact with people whom we often ignorantly and more often arrogantly consider to be our inferiors. Before the Throne of the Almighty we shall be judged, not by what we have eaten nor by whom we have been touched, but by whom we have served and how. Inasmuch as we serve a single human being in distress, we shall find favour in the sight of God. Bad and stimulating or dirty foods we must avoid as we must avoid bad contact. But let us not give these observances a place out of all proportion to their importance. We dare not use abstinence from certain foods as a cover for fraud, hypocrisy and worst vices. We dare not refuse to serve a fallen or a dirty brother lest his contact should injure our spiritual growth.

*Young India*, 5-1-1922, p. 3

Untouchability is the product, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this 'high-and-low'ness. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say,



according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true Varnadharma, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other.

*Harijan*, 11-2-1933, p. 3

#### CHAPTER 4

### THE FOUR CASTES

*Q* : You regard the four divisions of castes as based on birth. You also believe that a man's caste does not prevent him from doing the duties attaching to other castes, and that any man irrespective of his birth may have the qualities of a Brahmana or a Kshatriya or a Shudra. If this is the case, where is the use of maintaining this division, and consequently an order of superiority and inferiority? Why should the accident of birth make a man a Brahamana, or a Kshatriya or a Shudra? Why attach so much importance to birth?

*A* : In accepting the fourfold division, I am simply accepting the laws of Nature, taking for granted what is inherent in human nature, and the law of heredity. We are born with some of the traits of our parents. The fact that a human being is born only in the human species shows that some characteristic, i.e. caste is determined by birth. There is scope enough for freedom of the will inasmuch as we can to a certain extent reform some of our inherited characteristics. It is not possible in one birth entirely to undo the results

of our past doings, and, in the light of it, it is in every way right and proper to regard him as a Brahmana who is born of Brahmana parents. A Brahmana may, by doing the deeds of a Shudra, become a Shudra in this very birth, but the world loses nothing in continuing to treat him as a Brahmana. Caste as it exists today is no doubt a travesty of the original fourfold division which only defined men's different callings. And this trifling with it has been its undoing. But how can I, for that reason, discard the law of Nature which I see being fulfilled at every step? I know that if I discard it, I would be rid of a lot of trouble. But that would be an idle short cut. I have declared from the housetops that a man's caste is no matter for pride, that no superiority attaches to any of the four divisions. A true Brahmana will feel it an honour to serve the lowliest of Shudras. In fact a Brahmana, to be a Brahmana, should have the qualities of a Kshatriya, a Vaishya and a Shudra plus his own. Only he should predominantly be a man of divine knowledge. But caste today is in the crucible and only Heaven knows, or perhaps the Brahmanas know, the final result.

*Young India*, 21-1-1926, p. 30

## CHAPTER 5

### NOT MERELY BY BIRTH

The following three verses from Madame Wadia's instructive address delivered the other day will bear reproduction :

“Listen to these words of Yudhishtira in the Vana-parva of the Mahabharata:

‘Truth, charity, forgiveness, good conduct, gentleness, austerity and mercy, where these are seen, O King of the Serpents, there is a Brahmana. If these marks exist in a Shudra and are not in a Dvija, the Shudra is not a Shudra, nor the Brahmana a Brahmana.’

And in the Vishnu-Bhagavata we read:

‘What is said as to the marks of conduct indicative of a man's caste, if those marks are found in another, designate him by the caste of his marks’ (i.e. not of his body and birth).

But some of you would prefer Manusmriti. Well, here you are:

‘As a wooden elephant, as a leathern deer, such is an unlearned Brahmana; these three bear only names. The Brahmana, who, not having studied Vedas, labours elsewhere, becomes a Shudra in that very life together with his descendants.’ ”

These and numerous other verses from the Shastras unmistakably show that mere birth counts for nothing. A person must show corresponding works and character to establish his claim by birth.

*Harijan*, 15-4-1933, p. 2

Birth and observance of forms cannot determine one's superiority or inferiority. Character is the only

determining factor. God did not create men with the badge of superiority or inferiority, and no scripture which labels a human being as inferior or untouchable because of his or her birth can command our allegiance, it is a denial of God and Truth which is God.

*Harijan*, 31-8-1934, p. 225

In the purest type of Hinduism a Brahmana, an ant, an elephant and a dog-eater (*Shvapacha*) are of the same status. And because our philosophy is so high, and we have failed to live up to it, that very philosophy today stinks in our nostrils. Hinduism insists on the brotherhood not only of all mankind but of all that lives. It is a conception which makes one giddy, but we have to work up to it. The moment we have restored real living equality between man and man, we shall be able to establish equality between man and the whole creation. When that day comes we shall have peace on earth and good-will to men.

*Harijan*, 28-3-1936, p. 51



## **THE SIN OF UNTOUCHABILITY**





## CHAPTER 1

### THE GREATEST BLOT ON HINDUISM

I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism. This idea was not brought home to me by my bitter experiences during the South African struggle. It is not due to the fact that I was once an agnostic. It is equally wrong to think, as some people do, that I have taken my views from my study of Christian religious literature. These views date as far back as the time when I was neither enamoured of, nor was acquainted with, the Bible or the followers of the Bible.

I was hardly yet twelve when this idea had dawned on me. A scavenger name Uka, an untouchable, used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would ask my mother why it was wrong to touch him, why I was forbidden to touch him. If I accidentally touched Uka, I was asked to perform the ablutions, and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion, that it was impossible that it should be so. I was a very dutiful and obedient child and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents, I often had tussles with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful.

While at school I would often happen to touch the untouchables, and as I never would conceal the fact from my parents, my mother would tell me that the shortest cut to purification after the unholy touch was to cancel the touch by touching any Musalman passing by. And simply out of reverence and regard

for my mother I often did so, but never did so, believing it to be a religious obligation. After some time we shifted to Porbandar, where I made my first acquaintance with Sanskrit. I was not yet put to English school, and my brother and I were placed in charge of a Brahmana who taught us *Ramraksha* and *Vishnu Pooja*. The texts *Jale Vishnuh*, *Sthale Vishnuh*—there is the Lord (present) in water, there is the Lord (present) in earth—have never gone out of my memory. A motherly old dame used to live close by. Now it happened that I was very timid then, and would conjure up ghosts and goblins whenever the lights went out, and it was dark. The old mother, to disabuse me of fears, suggested that I should mutter the *Ramaraksha* texts whenever I was afraid, and all evil spirits would fly away. This I did and, as I thought, with good effect. I could never believe then that there was any text in the *Ramaraksha* pointing to the contact of the untouchables as a sin. I did not understand its meaning then, or understood it very imperfectly. But I was confident that *Ramaraksha*, which could destroy all fear of ghosts, could not be countenancing any such thing as fear of contact with the untouchables.

The *Ramayana* used to be regularly read in our family. A Brahmana called *Ladha Maharaj* used to read it. He was stricken with leprosy, and he was confident that a regular reading of the *Ramayana* would cure him of leprosy, and, indeed, he was cured of it. “How can the *Ramayana*,” I thought to myself, “in which one is regarded nowadays as an untouchable took Rama across the Ganga in his boat, countenance the idea of any human beings being untouchable on the ground that they were polluted souls?” The fact that we addressed God as the “purifier of the polluted”



and by similar appellations, shows that it is a sin to regard any one born in Hinduism as polluted or untouchable—that it is satanic to do so. I have hence been never tired of repeating that it is a great sin. I do not pretend that this thing had crystallized as a conviction in me at the age of twelve, but I do say that I did then regard untouchability as a sin. I narrate this story for the information of the Vaishnavas and orthodox Hindus.

I have always claimed to be a Sanatani Hindu. It is not that I am quite innocent of the scriptures. I am not a profound scholar of Sanskrit. I have read the Vedas and the Upanishads only in translations. Naturally, therefore, mine is not a scholarly study of them. My knowledge of them is in no way profound, but I have studied them as I should do as a Hindu and I claim to have grasped their true spirit. By the time I had reached the age of 21, I had studied other religions also.

There was a time when I was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity. When I recovered my balance of mind, I felt that to me salvation was possible only through the Hindu religion and my faith in Hinduism grew deeper and more enlightened.

But even then I believed that untouchability was no part of Hinduism; and that, if it was, such Hinduism was not for me.

True Hinduism does not regard untouchability as a sin. I do not want to enter into any controversy regarding the interpretation of the Shastras. It might be difficult for me to establish my point by quoting authorities from the Bhagavata or Manusmriti. But I claim to have understood the spirit of Hinduism.

Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to untouchability. It has degraded us, made us the pariahs of the Empire. Even the Musalmans caught the sinful contagion from us; and in South Africa, in East Africa and in Canada, Musalmans no less than Hindus came to be regarded as pariahs. All this evil has resulted from the sin of untouchability.

I may here recall my proposition, which is this: So long as the Hindus wilfully regard untouchability as part of their religion, so long as the mass of Hindus consider it a sin to touch a section of their brethren, Swaraj is impossible of attainment. Yudhishtira would not enter heaven without his dog. How can, then, the descendants of that Yudhishtira expect to obtain Swaraj without the untouchables? What crimes, for which we condemn the Government as satanic, have not we been guilty of towards our untouchable brethren?

.We are guilty of having suppressed our brethren; we make them crawl on their bellies; we have made them rub their noses on the ground; with eyes red with rage, we push them out of railway compartments—what more than this has British rule done? What charge, that we bring against Dyer and O'Dwyer, may not others, and even our own people, lay at our doors? We ought to purge ourselves of this pollution. It is idle to talk of Swaraj so long as we do not protect the weak and the helpless, or so long as it is possible for a single Swarajist to injure the feelings of any individual. Swaraj means that not a single Hindu or Muslim shall for a moment arrogantly think that he can crush with impunity meek Hindus or Muslims. Unless this condition is fulfilled, we will gain Swaraj only to lose it the next moment. We are no better

than the brutes until we have purged ourselves of the sins we have committed against our weaker brethren.

From a speech at Suppressed Classes Conference held at Ahmedabad, on April 13, 1921

*Young India*, 27-4-1921, p. 135

## CHAPTER 2

### UNTOUCHABILITY IN HINDUISM

Untouchability is the sin of the Hindus. They must suffer for it, they must purify themselves, they must pay the debt they owe to their suppressed brothers and sisters. Theirs is the shame and theirs must be the glory when they have purged themselves of the black sin. The silent loving suffering of one single pure Hindu as such will be enough to melt the hearts of millions of Hindus; but the sufferings of thousands of non-Hindus on behalf of the untouchables will leave the Hindus unmoved. Their blind eyes will not be opened by outside interference, however well-intentioned and generous it may be; for it will not bring home to them the sense of guilt. On the contrary, they would probably hug the sin all the more for such interference. All reform to be sincere and lasting must come from within.

*Young India*, 1-5-1924, p. 144

Let me make my position absolutely clear. While I do hold that the institution of untouchability as it stands today has no sanction in Hinduism, Hinduism does recognize untouchability in a limited sense and under certain circumstances. For instance, every time that my mother handled unclean things she



became untouchable for the time being and had to cleanse herself by bathing. As a Vaishnava I refuse to believe that anyone can be regarded untouchable by reason of his or her birth, and such untouchability as is recognized by religion is by its very nature transitory—easily removable and referable to the deed, not the doer. Not only that. Just as we revere our mother for the sanitary service that she renders us when we are infants, and the greater her service the greater is our reverence for her, similarly, the Bhangis are entitled to our highest reverence for the sanitary service they perform for society.

*Young India*, 22-1-1925, p. 29

It is my certain conviction that, if the Hindu heart is completely purged of the taint of untouchability, the event will have its inevitable influence not only upon all the communities in India but on the whole world. This belief is daily becoming stronger. I cannot remove from my heart untouchability regarding several millions of human beings and harbour it towards some other millions. The very act of the Hindu heart getting rid of distinctions of high and low must cure us of mutual jealousies and distrust of and among other communities. It is for that reason that I have staked my life on this issue. In fighting this battle against untouchability, I am fighting for unity not only among Hindu touchables and Hindu untouchables but among Hindus, Muslims, Christians and all other different religious communities. Do not for one moment believe that I am interested in the numerical strength of Hindus. I have never, throughout my life, laid stress upon quantity. I have ever insisted upon quality at the sacrifice of quantity. If I collected



a million false coins they would be a worthless burden to me. One true coin would be worth its value. A religion cannot be sustained by the number of its lip followers denying in their lives its tenets. This great Hindu religion itself will perish in spite of its so-called millions of followers, if its votaries persist in harbouring the evil of untouchability. Not because untouchables can be counted by the millions. It would perish even if they were a handful. Milk is poisoned and has to be thrown away whether you put a little or much arsenic in it.

*Harijan*, 17-11-1933, p. 4

### CHAPTER 3

## NO SANCTION FOR UNTOUCHABILITY

Untouchability is not a sanction of religion, it is a device of Satan. The devil has always quoted scriptures. But scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth. They are intended to purify reason and illuminate truth. I am not going to burn a spotless horse because the Vedas are reported to have advised, tolerated, or sanctioned the sacrifice. For me the Vedas are divine and unwritten. 'The letter killeth'. It is the spirit that giveth the light. And the spirit of the Vedas is purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave. There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating the great and uncomplaining scavengers of the nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon.

*Young India*, 19-1-1921, p. 22

I assure you that in Hinduism there is no sanction for treating a single human being as untouchable. In the estimation of a Brahmana knowing and living his religion, a Shudra is as good as himself. The Bhagavadgita has nowhere taught that a Chandala is in any way inferior to a Brahmana. A Brahmana ceases to be a Brahmana, immediately he becomes insolent and considers himself a superior being. India owes a deep debt to the Brahmanas who voluntarily sacrificed themselves for the betterment of all. It was Brahmanas who have called God Servant of servants, the Purifier of the fallen. It was Brahmanas who taught that the prostitute and the Chandala could attain *Moksha* if she or he only purified her or his heart.

But unfortunately for the human race the Brahmana shares with mankind the frailties of all. In common with others he has neglected his duty of giving knowledge to mankind, of guiding them in the right and truest path. We glibly charge Englishmen with insolence and haughtiness. Let us, before we cast the stone at them, free ourselves from liability to reproach. Let us put our own house in order.

*Young India*, 11-5-1921, p. 151

Hinduism is like the Ganga pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities in the way. Even like the Ganga it is beneficent in its total effect.

The Shastras are ever growing. The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puranas and Itihasas did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods, and therefore they seem to conflict with one another. These books do

not enunciate anew the eternal truths but show how these were practised at the time to which the books belong. A practice which was good enough in a particular period, would, if blindly repeated in another, land people into the 'slough of despond'. Because the practice of animal sacrifice obtained at one time, shall we revive it today? Because at one time, we used to eat beef, shall we also do so now? Because at one time, we used to chop off the hands and feet of thieves, shall we revive that barbarity today? Shall we revive polyandry? Shall we revive child marriages? Because we discarded a section of humanity one day, shall we brand their descendants today as outcastes?

Hinduism abhors stagnation. Knowledge is limitless and so also the application of truth. Every day we add to our knowledge of the power of Atman, and we shall keep on doing so. New experience will teach us new duties, but truth shall ever be the same.

*Young India*, 8-4-1926, p. 131

The stories told in the Puranas are some of them most dangerous, if we do not know their bearing on the present conditions. The Shastras would be death-traps if we were to regulate our conduct according to every detail given in them or according to that of the characters therein described. They help us only to define and argue out fundamental principles. If some well-known character in religious books sinned against God or man, is that a warrant for our repeating the sin? It is enough for us to be told, once for all, that Truth is the only thing that matters in the world, that Truth is God. It is irrelevant to be told that even Yudhishthira was betrayed into an untruth. It is



more relevant for us to know that when he spoke an untruth, he had to suffer for it that very moment and that his great name in no way protected him from punishment. Similarly, it is irrelevant for us to be told that Adishankara avoided a Chandala. It is enough for us to know that a religion that teaches us to treat all that lives as we treat ourselves, cannot possibly countenance the inhuman treatment of a single creature, let alone a whole class of perfectly innocent human beings. Moreover we have not even all the facts before us to judge what Adishankara did or did not do. Still less, do we know the meaning of the word Chandala where it occurs. It has admittedly many meanings, one of which is a sinner. But if all sinners are to be regarded as untouchables, it is very much to be feared that we should all, not excluding the Pandit\* himself, be under the ban of untouchability. That untouchability is an old institution, nobody has ever denied. But, if it is an evil, it cannot be defended on the ground of its antiquity.

*Young India*, 29-7-1926, p. 268

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\*This article from which this excerpt is made was written in answer to a plea for untouchability made by a Pandit from the South.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE CANKER OF SUPERIORITY

I notice throughout my tour in Cutch that, as in other parts of India, untouchables have among themselves also superior and inferior castes and the higher caste Antyaja will not touch the lower caste, will positively refuse to send their children to those belonging to the lower caste. Intermarriage and inter-dining between them is unthinkable. This is caste reduced to the grossest absurdity. And it is by way of protest against this arrogation of superiority by one class over another, that I delight in calling myself a Bhangi, that is a sweeper, beyond which so far as I am aware, inferiority does not travel. It is necessary if we will rid Hinduism of the course of natural inequalities, for some of us to rise with our whole soul in revolt against it. In my opinion he who claims superiority, by the very nature of the claim forfeits it. Real, natural superiority, comes without the claiming. It is recognized ungrudgingly and ever refused not pompously, not out of a false sense of modesty but because the superiority is not even felt, and because the superior man knows that there is no distinction whatsoever between the soul within himself and the soul within one who regards himself as his inferior. Recognition of the essential identity and oneness of all that lives excludes the very idea of superiority and inferiority. Life is duty, not a bundle of rights and privileges. That religion is doomed to destruction which bases itself upon a system of gradations high and low.

Such is not the meaning for me of Varnashrama. I believe in it because I imagine that it defines the duties of men belonging to different vocations. And Brahmana is he who is the servant of all, even of the Shudras and the untouchables. He dedicates his all to such service and lives upon the charity and sufferance of his fellow-being. He is no Kshatriya who puts forth pretensions to rank, power and privileges. He alone is a Kshatriya who uses the whole of himself for the defence and honour of society. And a Vaishya who earns for himself only, and believes in merely amassing wealth is a thief. A Shudra because he labours for hire on behalf of society is in no way inferior to the three classes. According to my conception of Hinduism there is no such thing as a fifth or 'untouchable' class. The so-called untouchables are as much privileged labourers of society as Shudras. Varnashrama seems to me to be an ideal system conceived for the highest good of society. What we see today is a travesty and a mockery of the original. And if Varnashrama is to abide, Hindus must sweep away the mockery and restore Varnashrama to its pristine dignity.

*Young India*, 5-11-1925, p. 380

The idea of superiority and inferiority is repugnant to the most elementary principles of morality. A Brahmana who considers himself superior to any single creature of God ceases to be a knower of Brahma. If we are children of the same God, how can there be any rank among us? The very first mention of Varna in the Vedas likens the four Varnas to the four main parts of the body. Is the head superior to the arms, the belly and the feet, or the feet superior to the other

three? What will happen to the body, if these members begin to quarrel about rank? The law of Varna is one of absolute equality among all the creatures of God. It is the basis of all the religions of the world. The verses in the Smritis about Shudras deserve to be summarily rejected as being contrary to the spirit of humanity.

*Harijan*, 28-9-1934, p. 258

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CRIME OF CASTE

An extraordinary case that was tried in a Madras Presidency court brings vividly to light the sad plight of our suppressed countrymen. A simple cleanly dressed Panchama entered a temple in a perfectly devotional spirit without the slightest intention of hurting anybody's feeling or insulting any religion. He had been in the habit of paying his respects at this temple every year though he did not enter it. But last year in his ecstatic mood he forgot himself and entered the temple. The priest in charge could not distinguish him from the others and therefore accepted his offering. But when he regained self-possession, he was terrified to find himself in a prohibited place and ran away from the temple. But some who knew him caught him and handed him to the police. The temple authorities when they discovered the crime, had the temple duly purified. Then followed a trial. A Hindu Magistrate convicted him and imposed a fine of Rs. 75 or one month's rigorous imprisonment for insulting his own religion! An appeal was filed. There was an elaborate argument over it. Judgment



had to be reserved! And when conviction was set aside, it was not because the court held that the poor Panchama had a right to enter the temple but because the prosecution in the lower court had forgotten to prove the insult. This is no triumph of justice or truth or religion or morality.

The only consolation to be derived from the successful appeal is the Panchama will not have to suffer imprisonment for having in his zeal for worship forgotten that he was a prohibited entrant. If however he or his fellow-Panchamas again dare to enter the temple, it is highly probable that they would be severely punished if they are not lynched by those who look down upon them with contempt.

It is a curious situation. We resent, and properly, the treatment meted out to our countrymen in South Africa. We are impatient to establish Swaraj. But we Hindus refuse to see the incongruity in treating a fifth of our own co-religionists as worse than dogs. For dogs are not untouchables. Some of us nowadays even keep them as drawing-room pets.

Much has no doubt been done to remove this evil. But it is all too little so long as prosecutions for temple entry are possible and so long as the suppressed classes continue to be denied the right of entering temples, using public wells, and sending their children freely to national schools. We must yield to them the same rights as we would have the Europeans concede to our countrymen in South Africa.

But this case is not without its relieving features. The quashing of the conviction is no doubt some consolation. But the best consolation lies in the fact of so many Savarna Hindus actively interesting themselves in the poor Panchama's behalf. The appeal



would not have been noted if some one had not gone to the accused's assistance. It is to be wished that every educated Hindu will constitute himself the untouchable's friend and regard it his duty to free him from the tyranny of custom masquerading under the name of religion. Not the entry of a Panchama into a temple but the brand of prohibition against him is an insult to religion and humanity.

*Young India*, 14-1-1926, p. 16

## CHAPTER 6

### ANTI-UNTOUCHABILITY—A MOVEMENT OF SELF-PURIFICATION

To remove untouchability is a penance that caste-Hindus owe to Hinduism and to themselves. The purification required is not of untouchables but of the so-called superior castes. There is no vice that is special to the untouchables, not even dirt and insantiation. It is our arrogance which blinds us, superior Hindus, to our own blemishes and which magnifies those of our downtrodden brethren whom we have suppressed and whom we keep under suppression. Religions like nations are being weighed in the balance. God's grace and revelation are the monopoly of no race or nation. They descend equally upon all who wait upon God. That religion and that nation will be blotted out of the face of the earth which pins its faith to injustice, untruth or violence. God is Light, not darkness. God is Love, not hate. God is Truth, not untruth. God alone is great. We His creatures are but dust. Let us be humble and recognize the

place of the lowliest of His creatures. Krishna honoured Sudama in his rags as he honoured no one else. Love is the root of religion.

*Young India*, 26-12-1924, pp. 423-24

There are some people in Kanpur who look upon the Harijan movement as irreligious and have issued a large number of leaflets for public consumption. I was sorry to find that these were full of palpable falsehoods and insidious half-truths, exaggerations and distortions. How I wish these statements were made unintentionally! For instance, it is said that reformers in some places slaughtered Sanatanists without mercy; but I know nothing about it. If I did, I need scarcely say I would take strong action to check it. What a deep tragedy it is that these falsehoods are spread in the name of Sanatana Dharma! I appeal to Sanatanists to stop this campaign of falsehoods.

You would give lakhs, where you now give thousands, if you understood the far-reaching character of the Harijan movement. Nevertheless our goal cannot be achieved by collections, no matter how large they are. It will be achieved only with the melting of Savarna Hindu hearts. This is a movement of purification. It has nothing to do with the counting of heads. We do not seek to make *goondas* of Harijans. We seek to make them worthy citizens. If we succeed, the world will benefit as well as we. At present the world would be fully justified in despising us and our faith in the maltreatment of five crores of our own kith and kin in the name of religion.

I have regard for black flaggers, no less than for reformers and if it was possible I would gladly go away as they wish me to do. But I consider it my religious duty to bear witness to truth as I see it and any number

of black flags or even a bomb or revolver cannot prevent me from discharging it by such means as are open to me. I am but an imperfect being and not a *tapasvi* who could blow away untouchability with a breath from the Himalayas. I can only speak to such as are inclined to hear me and for this I am going about from place to place, although I long for rest from the toil of continuous travel.

Let me tell the Sanatanists who claim to be monopolists of religious truth that I believe in the same Shastras as they do. I have profound disagreements with them as regards the interpretation of these Shastras which lay down that, when there is a conflict of interpretation, one must follow the promptings of one's own conscience, and that is exactly what I am doing. I would be the Sanatanists' slave if they could convince me that I was wrong. Meanwhile, I will say even with my last breath that if we do not wash out the stain of untouchability, Hindus and Hinduism will be wiped out from the face of the earth.

Let me repeat the implications of this movement. It is limited to the removal of the feeling of superiority and inferiority and has nothing to do with interdining and intermarriage. I personally interdine with Bhangis and Musalmans. I am not ashamed of this. On the other hand I think my conduct in this respect is fully in consonance with the Shastras. But it has nothing to do with this movement. Interdining and intermarriage are matters of individual choice. There is no need nor can I spare the time for such propaganda. I only place the essentials of religion before the people for their acceptance. The movement claims for Harijans the same social, civic and religious rights as belonging to any other Hindus.



As regards temple entry, you should know that no temple is opened to Harijans except with the full consent of those who attend that temple for worship. Temples must be opened as part of our penance. Not a single pie from the Harijan fund is spent on temple building. Our constant effort is to ensure as large a part of it as possible to find its way into Harijan pockets in one way or other.

From an authorized translation of Gandhiji's speech in Hindi delivered at a public meeting held at Kanpur on 22-7-1934

*Harijan*, 3-8-1934, p. 194

## CHAPTER 7

### TOWARDS BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

. . . I do not believe that life is divided into separate air-tight compartments. On the contrary, it is an undivided and indivisible whole; and, therefore, what is or may be good for one must be good for all. Whatever activity fails to stand that unmistakable test is an activity that must be abjured by all who have the public weal at heart.

Having throughout my life believed in this doctrine of universal good, never have I taken up any activity—be it sectional or national—which would be detrimental to the good of humanity as a whole. And in pursuing that universal goal, I discovered years ago that untouchability, as it is practised today among Hindus, is a hindrance not only to the march of Hindus towards their own good, but also a hindrance to the general good of all. He who runs may discover for himself how this untouchability has taken in its



snaky coil not merely caste-Hindus but all other communities representing different faiths in India, that is to say, Musalmans, Christians and others. In dealing with the monster of untouchability, my own innermost desire is not that the brotherhood of Hindus only may be achieved, but it essentially is that the brotherhood of man—be the Hindu, Musalman, Christian, Parsi or Jew—may be realized. For, I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.

Hence it is that I have not hesitated to ask all non-Hindus to help me with their prayer in this mission, and it is because I have a living faith in my mission and because that faith is based on an extensive experience that I have not hesitated to say with the greatest deliberation that, if we, Hindus, do not destroy this monster of untouchability, it will devour both Hindus and Hinduism. And when I ask you to purify your hearts of untouchability, I ask of you nothing less than this—that you should believe in the fundamental unity and equality of man. I invite you all to forget that there are any distinctions of high and low among the children of one and the same God.

And therefore it is that I have not hesitated to plead on bended knees before those caste-Hindus who call themselves Sanatanists that they should join hands with me in this movement of self-purification. If they would only patiently study it and its implications,

they would discover that there are more points of contact than of difference between them and the reformers. They cannot possibly, if they will study the movement, justify themselves in subjecting to indignities all those who are considered untouchables. Not far from Trichinopoly there is a place called Melarasur. There the Harijans have claimed to use public tanks in common with the others. Law permits the use of these tanks by Harijans. Nevertheless caste Hindus have taken the law into their own hands: and I understand that in a variety of ways they have persecuted these brethren of ours. This is but one illustration out of many that I could give you of the ill-treatment of Harijans. No religious sophistry can possibly justify conduct such as this.

From a speech delivered by Gandhiji at a public meeting held at Trichinopoly on the 10th February, 1934

*Harijan*, 16-2-1934, pp. 5-6

This 'touch-me-not-ism' has not been confined to Harijans, but it has affected caste against caste, and religion against religion. I, for one, shall not be satisfied until, as the result of this movement, we have arrived at heart-unity amongst all the different races and communities inhabiting this land, and it is for that reason that I have invited the co-operation of all the people living in India and even outside.

*Harijan*, 16-2-1934, p. 7

And remember, too, the magnificent result that we intend, or we expect, to achieve from this removal of untouchability—it is no less than the realization of the brotherhood of Man. You cannot,—millions of caste-Hindus cannot—do reparation to several million Harijans, whom they have suppressed



for centuries, without setting free a power, a force, that will envelop the whole of the human family and knit all its members together into one. And it is because I have never lost sight of this goal that I have called this movement a deeply spiritual and exclusively religious movement. And it is because I realize to the fullest extent how untouchability, as we practise it today in the name of religion, is a stumbling block in the realization of this brotherhood that I have not hesitated to say that, if we do not cleanse ourselves of this cursed untouchability, Hinduism and Hindus are bound to perish. . . . I know that there are people among us who still cling to the belief that untouchability is not only not a sin, but is an obligation imposed upon us by the Shastras. As against that, I can but give you my own personal experience based upon uniform conduct for the past fifty years, and that experience is backed by a study of our Shastras such as is possible for a layman, and at that, a busy man like myself. After that prayerful study, after discussion with learned Shastris who believe in untouchability, I have come to the deliberate conclusion that untouchability has no warrant whatsoever in the Hindu Shastras. It is a sin before God and man. The sooner we get rid of this sin the better it is for us, for the whole world.

From a speech by Gandhiji at Arkonam on 21st February, 1934

*Harijan*, 2-3-1934, p. 22

In battling against untouchability and in dedicating myself to that battle, I have no less an ambition than to see a complete regeneration of humanity. It may be a mere dream, as unreal as the silver in the



sea-shell. It is not so to me while the dream lasts, and in the words of Romain Rolland, 'Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it'.

*Young India*, 26-11-1931, p. 372

## CHAPTER 8

### CONVERSION NO REMEDY

If, afflicted by the persecution and losing hope of ever receiving help from the other Savarna Hindus, the poor Harijans seek the shelter of Christianity, we may not be surprised. And our grief is worse than useless if we cannot turn it into powerful energy. Conversion under the stress of physical discomfort is no spiritual conversion. But we may not grumble if Harijans change their faith in order to better their material condition and to secure protection from persecution.

What we need deplore is the cause of conversion. Let us realize and own that Savarna Hindus are the cause. Will they listen to this advice? Conversions are but one small result of the disease. Remove the cause, and the conversions will cease, as also many worse results.

*Harijan*, 22-3-1935, p. 42

Men who threaten to leave their religion, because some other men, pretending to be of the same faith as they, prevent them from entering temples, have little religion about them. Such men cannot be said to be actuated by the religious spirit. Temples are houses of worship. They are for all who believe in them. Religious persecution is not a thing of today. It is as

ancient as religion itself. It tries and purifies the persecuted who prove themselves staunch in their faith. If Harijans can patiently bear persecution, they are bound to come triumphant in the end.

But the threat to desert the faith they have uncompainingly professed from time immemorial, if their right of temple-entry is not recognized, puts them out of court. Sanatanists probably do not care if Harijans leave the Hindu fold. Reformers will be nonplussed if they have no case to fight for. Fortunately, there are tens of thousands of Harijans whose faith remains unshakable in spite of persecution.

Religion is an essentially personal matter. It is one between oneself and one's God. It should never be made a matter of bargain.

*Harijan*, 29-3-1935, p. 52

It is an admitted fact that the conduct of a vast number of Hindus who call themselves Sanatanists is such as to cause the greatest inconvenience and irritation to the Harijans all over India. The wonder is that many more Harijans than already have, have not left Hinduism. It speaks volumes for their loyalty or for the innate virtue of Hinduism that millions of Harijans have clung to it in spite of the inhumanities to which in the name of that very faith they have been subjected.

This wonderful loyalty of Harijans and their unexampled patience render it imperative for every Savarna Hindu to see that Harijans receive the same treatment that every other Hindu does. The course before Savarnas is, therefore, on the one hand, not to interfere with Harijans wishing to leave the Hindu fold by trying to keep them within it by the offer of



bribes in the shape of finding employment or scholarships; and on the other hand, to insist on full justice being done to Harijans in every walk of life. Indeed reformers should anticipate the Harijans' requirements and not wait till they begin to complain. The greatest hardship felt by thousands of Harijans is want of pure water for drinking and domestic use, denial of access to public schools and other institutions, constant pin-pricks in villages, and last but not least, denial of access to temples of worship. These disabilities are stern realities in the lives of the vast masses of Harijans. If they as a mass give up Hinduism, they will do so because of these common disabilities which brand them as lepers of Hindu society. Hinduism is passing through a fiery ordeal. It will perish not through individual conversions, not even through mass conversions, but it will perish because of the sinful denial by the so-called Savarna Hindus of elementary justice to Harijans. Every threat of conversion is, therefore, a warning to the Savarnas that if they do not wake up in time it may be too late!

One word to the impatient and needy Harijans. They must not use threats when they approach Hindu institutions or individuals for help. They should rely upon the strength of their case demanding a hearing. The majority of Harijans do not know what change of religion can mean. They mutely suffer the continuing degradation to which Savarnas in their selfishness have consigned them. They must be the primary care of Hindu reformers whether they complain or do not. Those who are enlightened enough to know and feel the degradation and know also what change of religion means are either too good Hindus to desert their ancestral faith and deserve



every help they need, or being indifferent as to religion may not claim help from Savarna Hindus in exchange for their condescending to remain in the Hindu fold. I would, therefore, plead with enlightened Harijans for their own sakes not to seek material betterment under threat of conversion. And whilst reformers must on no account yield to threats, they must ceaselessly strive to secure justice for Harijans at the hands of Savarna Hindus.

*Harijan*, 21-3-1936, p. 44

## CHAPTER 9

### TEMPLE-ENTRY FOR UNTOUCHABLES

It is the persecutors who are unknowingly defiling their own religion by keeping out of public temples men who are at least as honourable as they claim to be themselves and are willing to abide by all the ceremonial rules observable by Hindus in general on such occasions. More than that no man has any right to impose or expect. The heart of man only God knows. An ill-dressed Panchama may have a much cleaner heart than a meticulously dressed high caste Hindu.

*Young India*, 11-3-1926, p. 95

Temple entry is the one spiritual act that would constitute the message of freedom to the untouchables and assure them that they are not outcastes before God.

*Harijan*, 11-2-1933, p. 5

I have absolutely no desire that the temple should be opened to Harijans, until caste Hindu opinion is ripe for the opening. It is not a question of Harijans

asserting their right of temple entry or claiming it. They may or may not want to enter that temple even when it is declared open to them. But it is the bounden duty of every caste Hindu to secure that opening for Harijans.

[From a speech at Shrirangam]

*Harijan*, 23-2-1934, p. 10

If all that there is in the universe is pervaded by God, that is to say, if the Brahmana and the Bhangi, the learned man and the scavenger, the Ezhava and the Pariah, no matter what caste they belong to—if all these are pervaded by Lord God, in the light of this Mantra\*, there is none that is high and none that is low, all are absolutely equal, equal because all are the creatures of that Creator. And this is not a philosophical thing to be dished out to Brahmanas or Kshatriyas, but it enunciates an eternal truth which admits of no reduction, no palliation. . . .And if that is so, how can anyone here dare to arrogate superiority to himself or herself over any other human being? I tell you, therefore, that if this Mantra holds good, if there is any man or woman here who believes that the temples are defiled by those called Avarnas, that person, I declare, would be guilty of a grave sin.

*Harijan*, 30-1-1937, p. 408

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\*ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत् ।

तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद् धनम् ॥

This verse when translated would read as follows:

“God, the Ruler, pervades all there is in this universe. Therefore renounce and dedicate all to Him and then enjoy or use the portion that may fall to thy lot. Never covet anybody’s possessions.”

(With reference to Gandhiji's 'anti-untouchability' fast in Yeravda Jail during the latter part of 1932, a correspondent wrote to him: "Hitherto I have known you to be free from any trace of communalism, but you now suddenly appear in a communal garb. I could have understood and justified your fast for Swaraj or for all-India unity, but I cannot understand this fast on behalf of Hinduism. I have never taken you as a Hindu at all, certainly not as a narrow Hindu. What is there in opening the temples to Harijans, who do not want to go there?" Gandhiji replied to the correspondent as follows:)

I am glad of this question. I have no desire whatsoever to appear to anyone as other than what I am. I am not ashamed of Hinduism or of being a Hindu. I totally deny being narrow. I fancy I could not be held for one single moment by a narrow creed, and it is because the super-imposition of untouchability would make Hinduism a narrow creed that I have rebelled against it, and I would count my life to be a cheap price to pay for the removal of that blot.

I have nothing of the communalist in me, because my Hinduism is all inclusive. It is not anti-Musalman, anti-Christian or anti-any-other-religion. But it is pro-Musalman, pro-Christian and pro-every other-living-faith in the world. To me, Hinduism is but one branch from the same parent trunk, whose roots and quality we judge only by the collective strength and quality of the different branches put together. And if I take care of the Hindu branch on which I am sitting and which sustains me, surely I am taking care also of the sister branches. If the Hindu branch is poisoned, the poison is likely to spread to others. If that branch withers, the parent will be the weaker for its withering.



If my correspondent and those who think with him have followed me hitherto, they will discover that if God gives me the privilege of dying for this Hinduism of my conception, I shall have sufficiently died for the unity of all and even for Swaraj. Finally let me repeat what I have said before now that the question whether Harijans want to or would enter into temples, if they were open to them, is irrelevant. The removal of untouchability is not a matter of bestowing patronage on Harijans. It is one of penance and purification by the caste Hindus, and one of the penances they have to do is to open the Hindu temples and invite the Harijans to them.

*My Soul's Agony*, 28-11-1932, pp. 70-71

## CHAPTER 10

### TEMPLE-ENTRY *vs.* ECONOMIC UPLIFT

One sees sometimes in the public press criticism on the temple-entry question. It is double-barrelled, being directed on the one hand by Harijans and on the other by Sanatanists. Some of the Harijans say, 'We do not want temple-entry; do not build temples, but use all you receive for economic uplift.' Some Sanatanists say, 'Give up the temple-entry question altogether. You are hurting our feelings by forcing Harijans into temples.' Both are wrong in substance. Not one single pice out of the purse has been or will be spent for building temples. Attempt is being made only to have public temples opened to Harijans on the same terms on which they are open to the other Hindus. It is a matter of choice for the Harijans

to visit or not to visit them. Savarna Hindus have to lift the bar against Harijans. For those millions who regard temples as treasure chests of spiritual wealth, they are living realities which they hold dear as life itself. If they are truly repentant towards Harijans, they must share these treasures with the latter. I know what the opening of temples means to Harijans. Only last week, between Dharwad and Belgaum, I opened three temples to Harijans in the presence of crowds of Savarna Hindus and Harijans. If critics had been present at the opening and noticed the pleasure on the countenances of the Harijans present as they bowed before the image and received the *prasad*, their criticism would have been silenced. Harijan critics would have realized that, apart from themselves, Harijans at large did desire temple-entry. Sanatanist critics would have realized that temples, wherever they were opened, were being opened with the fullest concurrence of the temple-goers concerned and in the presence of crowds of them. No hole-and-corner opening can do any good whatsoever to Hinduism. To be of spiritual or any value at all, the opening has to be performed with due publicity, solemnity and the willing consent of the existing temple-goers, and not of such self-styled reformers as have no faith or interest in temples and for whom temples may even be a superstition. Temple-entry agitation requires no financial outlay; it does not lend itself to agitation except by a few workers who have faith in temples and whose word would command attention from the mass Savarna mind. It is, therefore, a question that can only be and is being gently and cautiously handled. The only insistence is on the right and the duty of the believing reformer advocating temple-entry and showing that

without it the reformation will not only be incomplete but fruitless. For, without temples being freely open to Harijans, untouchability could not be said to have been removed root and branch.

As for the economic uplift, it is altogether wrong to put it in opposition to temple-entry. Temple-entry can only help such uplift. For, when Harijans are freely admitted to temples, all the avenues to economic betterment must be automatically open to Harijans as to others. So far as the moneys received are concerned, they will all be used only for economic uplift, if it is admitted that educational uplift also means economic, in that it makes the educated Harijan fitter for running life's race.

*Harijan*, 16-3-1934, p. 36

## CHAPTER 11

### TEMPLES FOR UNTOUCHABLES

In the beginning of the movement as I had conceived it on my return from South Africa in 1915, I had thought that it was wholly inconsistent with the movement for removing untouchability to build separate temples or schools for them. But experience taught me that the movement could not proceed upon strict logic, and that we Hindus had so much suppressed a third of ourselves that even after the articulate Hindus had with one voice declared for removal, the suppressed brethren would for a long time need the helping hand in a variety of ways. After the theoretical, lip-removal of untouchability, if no special effort was



made, the vast bulk of them would not readily take advantage of the removal and the ignorant mass would not tolerate them especially when the latter would be naturally clumsy in their deportment or pardonably forward in the enjoyment of long withheld freedom. I am therefore convinced that the two things will have to go hand in hand—perfect freedom to enter ordinary temples and ordinary schools and to use common wells, at the same time as erection of model schools and model temples specially designed for the convenience of untouchables but open to the others subject always to priority for untouchables. It was along this line of reasoning that I suggested in the brief note for the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* that the municipalities could foster removal of untouchability by erecting temples and model schools for the suppressed classes side by side with the attempt to have the existing temples thrown open to these countrymen of ours. My note may therefore on no account be taken as an excuse for condoning prohibition against entry into temples etc.

*Young India*, 28-11-1929, pp. 388-89

## CHAPTER 12

### TO SANATANISTS

Almost every letter that I have received from the Sanatanists makes these agreeable startling admissions:

1. We admit that there is much to be done for the amelioration of the Harijans.

2. We admit that many caste Hindus are ill-treating the Harijans.

3. We admit that Harijan children should receive education.

4. We admit that Harijans should have better quarters to live in.

5. We admit that they should have proper arrangements for bathing and drawing water for themselves.

6. We admit that they should have full practical rights.

7. We admit that they should have ample facilities for worship; and

8. We admit that they should have all the civic rights that the others have.

“But,” say the Sanatanists, “we must not be compelled to touch them or associate with them, especially whilst they are in their present condition.”

Then I say to them, “Since you admit the necessity for putting them on the same level with you, why are you agitated when other caste Hindus will go a step further and believe, on the strength of the same Shastras that you believe in, that it is their duty not to regard the Harijans as untouchables but to have

them share with themselves all those rights and privileges which you concede to them, but which you would have them to enjoy and exercise in isolation from you. Surely you, who want to guard your own liberty of action and rightly resent the very idea of coercion, will not desire that the reformers should be coerced into carrying out schemes of amelioration which you hold to be necessary, in exactly the same manner as you would like.

“I venture to suggest a better way. Since you are at one with the reformers in conceding the desirability of ameliorating the condition of the Harijans, and since you have not hitherto done anything tangible in that direction, subscribe liberally to the funds that the reformers are collecting, and use them as your agents for carrying out the common scheme and respect their interpretation of Hindu religion as you would have them to respect yours. Hitherto in practice, you have not resented the reformer’s action in associating with the Harijans. You have suffered him to go his own way. You have not boycotted him. There is then no meaning in your opposition now, simply because the movement has become more active and more universal than before.”

One difficulty still stands in the way. Who is to have the use of public temples and other public institutions that are in existence and from which Harijans are at present debarred, in some cases legally, and in other far more numerous cases illegally? The Sanatanists, or the reformers together with the Harijans? There is a very simple way out of the difficulty. If only each party will shed anger and mutual disrespect, a referendum can easily be taken for each village



or a group of villages and each city or each division of a city, and whichever party has the majority in favour of its view should make use of the public institutions including temples. And if the Sanatanists carry the majority with them they should defray their share with the reformers of the cost of providing equal services for the reformers and the Harijans. I bracket the reformers with the Harijans, for if they are worth their salt and will work up to their convictions, as time progresses the duty must dawn upon them of denying to themselves the use of a single service which the Harijans cannot enjoy with caste Hindus on absolutely equal terms. Following out this train of reasoning the Sanatanists will see that in justice they should bear the whole cost of bringing into being parallel services because, as I have understood the correspondence and as I have explained above, the Sanatanists agree that the Harijans are entitled to the same services that they have hitherto enjoyed and of which Harijans have hitherto been deprived.

Let not the Sanatanists run away with themselves by picturing a condition of things as existing but which in reality does not exist. Let them clearly understand that removal of untouchability, in accordance with the Yeravda Pact and with the declaration of the recently formed Servants of Untouchables Society, includes no more than I have narrated. It does not include interdining and intermarriage. That many Hindus, including myself, would go much further ought not to disturb the Sanatanists. They will not want to stifle private judgment or private action, and if they have deep faith in what they believe, they should not take fright in anticipation of what is to come. If a particular reform has inherent

vitality and has come in response to the needs of the time, no power on earth can stem its irresistible march.

*My Soul's Agony*, 16-11-1932, pp. 49-52

## CHAPTER 13

### TO CASTE HINDUS

What though a man drinks, kills cows and eats carrion? He is no doubt an evil-doer though no greater than the one who commits secret and more deadly sins. But he is not to be treated as an untouchable even as society does not treat the secret sinner as one. Sinners are not to be despised, but pitied and helped to rid themselves of their sinfulness. The existence of untouchability among Hindus is a denial of the doctrine of Ahimsa on which we pride ourselves. We are responsible for the evils among the untouchables. What have we done to wean them from their ways? Do we not spend a fortune to reform members of our own families? Are the untouchables not members of the great Hindu family? Indeed, Hinduism teaches us to regard the whole of humanity as one indivisible and undivided family and holds each one of us responsible for the misdeeds of all. But if it is not possible to act up to the grand doctrine for its vastness, let us at least understand the unity of untouchables with us since we regard them as Hindus.

And what is worse, eating carrion or thinking carrion? We daily create, harbour and nourish millions of untouchable thoughts. Let us shed them, for they are the true untouchables deserving to be

hated and cast out. And let us do penance for our past injustice towards the intouchable brothers by lovingly embracing them. The correspondent does not question the duty of serving the untouchables. How are we to serve them if their very sight offends and pollutes us?

*Young India*, 13-5-1926, p. 176

Brute force will not sustain untouchability. It will bring about a revulsion of feeling in favour of the suppressed classes. It is a sign of the times that there were at least some 'touchables' who tried to defend the poor untouchables. . . . Silent sympathy on such occasions is not of much use. Every Hindu, who considers the removal of untouchability to be of paramount importance, should on such occasions prove his sympathy by publicly defending the suppressed classes and having his own head broken in defending the helpless and the downtrodden.

*Young India*, 28-4-1927, p. 134

Let me tell you that it is not enough for you to hold the belief passively that untouchability is a crime. He who is a passive spectator of crime is really, and in law, an active participator in it. You must therefore begin and continue your agitation along all lawful and legitimate lines.

Let me if my voice will reach them, carry my voice to the Brahmana priests who are opposing this belated reform. It is a painful fact, but it is a historical truth, that priests who should have been the real custodians of religion have been instrumental in destroying the religion of which they have been custodians. I see before my eyes the Brahmana priests in Travancore and also elsewhere destroying the very



religion of which they are supposed to be custodians, from their ignorance or worse. All their learning, when it is utilized in order to sustain a hideous superstition, a terrible wrong, turns to dust. I wish therefore that they will recognize before it is too late the signs of the times and march with the events which are taking them and us voluntarily or involuntarily along the path of truth.

[From a speech in Nagercoil]

*Young India*, 20-10-1927, p. 353

I do preach to the Harijans cleanliness, abstention from carrion-eating and intoxicating drinks and drugs, necessity of taking education themselves and giving it to their children, also abstention from eating the leavings from caste Hindus' plates, etc. Only, I do not put these before Harijans as conditions precedent to the removal of untouchability. On the contrary, I suggest to caste Hindus that the shortcomings are not inherent to Harijans but that they are due to our criminal neglect of—even deliberate suppression of—these brethren of ours. Therefore, the disappearance of these shortcomings will take place sooner for our fraternizing with Harijans even as they are, and then helping them to become better men and women. That is the least penance caste Hindus can do for the past wrongs. We must approach Harijans as penitents or debtors, not as their patrons or creditors extending generosity to the undeserving.

*Harijan*, 28-9-1934, pp. 257-58

## CHAPTER 14

### TO 'UNTOUCHABLES'

You should realize that you are cleaning Hindu society. You have therefore to purify your lives. You should cultivate the habits of cleanliness, so that no one may point his finger at you. Use alkali ash or earth if you cannot afford to use soap, to keep yourselves clean. Some of you are given to drinking and gambling which you must get rid of. You will point your fingers at the Brahmanas and say 'even they are given to these vices'. But they are not looked upon as polluted; and you are. You must not ask caste Hindus to emancipate you as a matter of favour. They must do so, if they want, in their own interests. You should, therefore, make them feel ashamed by your own purity and cleanliness.

You claim to be Hindus; you read the Bhagawata; if therefore, the Hindus oppress you then you should understand that fault does not lie in the Hindu religion but in those who profess it. Learn spinning and weaving; if you take them up as a profession, you will keep poverty from your doors.

As regards your attitude towards the Bhangis I will repeat what I said at Godhra. I cannot understand why you should yourselves countenance the distinction between Dheds and Bhangis. There is no difference between them. Even in normal times their occupation is as honourable as that of lawyers or Government servants.

You should cease to accept leavings from plates however clean they may be represented to be. Receive

grain only—good, sound grain, not rotten grain, and that too only if it is courteously offered. If you are able to do all I have asked you to do, you will secure your emancipation, not in four or five months, but in so many days.

The Hindus are not sinful by nature—they are sunk in ignorance. Untouchability must be extinct in this very year. Two of the strongest desires that keep me in flesh and bone are the emancipation of the untouchables and the protection of the cow. When these two desires are fulfilled, there is Swaraj, and therein lies my own *moksha*. May God give you strength to work out your salvation.

[From a speech at the Suppressed Classes Conference in Ahmedabad]

*Young India*, 4-5-1921, p. 144

Just one word at this great meeting to Harijan brothers and sisters who may be present. You cannot be free from this self-purification. You, too, have to bring your own sacrifice to this altar and that consists in the strict observance of the laws of sanitation—internal and external, and secondly, in the giving up of carrion-and beef-eating, wherever that habit still persists. In every part of the civilized world carrion is abhorred. It is considered unfit for human consumption. And no one can call himself a Hindu and partake of beef. Sacredness of the cow and her worship are an integral part of Hinduism. Thirdly, I would ask every Harijan, man and woman present here, to give up the habit of drinking. Let no Harijan say to himself or herself or to me that many Savarna Hindus also drink. I would beseech you as a fellow Harijan by choice to shun all vices of Savarna



Hindus. In spite of all the reparation that Savarna Hindus may make to you, in spite of all the repentance they may show in the presence of God, after all, in the ultimate resort, your salvation will rest with yourselves.

[From a speech in Bangalore]

*Harijan*, 19-1-1934, pp. 4-5

## CHAPTER 15

### SOME PERTINENT QUESTIONS

1. What are the practical steps to be taken to remove untouchability?

(a) To open to untouchables all public schools, temples and roads that are open to non-Brahmanas and are not exclusively devoted to any particular caste.

(b) For caste Hindus to open schools for their children, to dig wells for them where they are in need and to render them all personal service that they may need, e.g. to carry on temperance and hygiene reform among them and to provide them with medical aid.

2. What would be the religious status of the untouchables when the ban of untouchability is completely removed?

The religious status would be the same as that of the caste Hindus. They will therefore be classed as Shudras instead of Ati-Shudras.

3. What would be the relation between the untouchable and the high caste orthodox Brahmana, when untouchability is removed?

The same as with non-Brahmana Hindus.

4. Do you advocate inter-mingling of castes?

I would abolish all castes and would keep the four divisions.

5. Why should not the untouchables build temples for their own worship, without interfering with the existing temples?

The 'higher' castes have not left them much capacity for such enterprise. It is the wrong way of looking at the question to say that they interfere with our temples. We the so-called higher caste men have to do our duty by admitting them to the temples common to all Hindus.

6. Are you an advocate of communal representation, and do you hold that the untouchables must have representation in all administrative bodies?

I am not. But if the untouchables are purposely shut out by the influential castes, it would be an improper exclusion barring the road to Swaraj. My disapproval of communal representation does not mean exclusion of any community from representation but on the contrary, it lays the burden on the represented communities to see to the proper representation of the unrepresented or inadequately represented communities.

7. Are you a believer in the efficacy of Varna-shrama Dharma?

Yes. But there is today a travesty of Varna, no trace of Ashrama and a misrepresentation of Dharma. The whole system needs to be revised and brought in unison with the latest discoveries in the field of religion.

8. Don't you believe that India is Karmabhumi, and that everybody born here is endowed with wealth

and intelligence, social status and religious aspirations according to his good or ill deeds in his previous birth?

Not in the sense the correspondent means. For everybody everywhere reaps as he sows. But India is essentially Karmabhumi (Land of Duty) in contradistinction to Bhogabhumi (Land of Enjoyment).

9. Is not education and reform among the untouchables a primary condition to be fulfilled ere one can begin to talk of the removal of untouchability?

There can be no reform or education among the untouchables without the removal of untouchability.

10. Is it not natural and just as it should be, that non-drunkards avoid drunkards, and that vegetarians avoid non-vegetarians?

Not necessarily. A teetotaller would regard it as his duty to associate with his drunkard brother for the purpose of weaning him from the evil habit. So may a vegetarian seek out a non-vegetarian.

11. Is it not true, that a pure man (in the sense that he is a teetotaller and vegetarian), easily becomes an impure man (in the sense that he becomes a drunkard and non-vegetarian), when he is made to mingle with men, who drink, and kill, and eat animals?

A man who, being unconscious of the wrong, drinks wine and eats flesh foods, is not necessarily an impure man. But I can understand the possibility of evil resulting from one being made to mingle with a corrupt person. In our case, however, there is no case of making anyone associate with untouchables.

12. Is it not owing to the above fact that a certain class of orthodox Brahmanas do not mingle with the other castes (including the untouchables) but constitute themselves into a separate class, and live together for their spiritual uplift?



It must be a poor spirituality that requires to be locked up in a safe. Moreover the days are gone when men used to guard their virtue by permanent isolation.

13. Would you not be interfering with the religions and caste-system (Varnashrama Dharma) of India whatever may be the bad or good points of the above system and religions, if you advocate the removal of untouchability?

How do I interfere with anything or anybody by mere advocacy of a reform? Interference there would be, if I were to advocate removal of untouchability by the use of force against those who retain untouchability.

14. Would you not be guilty of doing Himsa to the orthodox Brahmanas if you interfere with their religious beliefs without convincing them in the first instance?

I cannot be guilty of Himsa to the orthodox Brahmanas as I do not interfere with their religious belief except through conviction.

15. Are not the Brahmanas guilty of untouchability, when they do not touch, dine with or marry the various other castes, leaving alone the untouchables?

Brahmanas are guilty of the sin if they refuse to 'touch' the other castes.

16. Does it satisfy the hunger of the untouchable when he is made to parade Brahmana Agraharams, in the exercise of his right as a man?

Man does not live by bread alone. Many prefer self-respect to food.

17. Does not Satyagraha in this direction lead to violence, seeing that the untouchables are not so well educated as to understand the full doctrine of

non-violent non-co-operation, and also seeing that the Brahmana cares more for his religion than for politics?

If reference is to Vykom, experience shows that the untouchable has shown amazing self-restraint. The latter part of the question suggests the possibility of violence by the Brahmanas concerned. I should be sorry if they resort to violence. They would then have shown, in my opinion, not regard for religion, but ignorance of and contempt for religion.

18. Do you advocate that all should become equal, without any distinction of caste, race, creed or avocation?

Such should be the case in the eye of the law in the matter of elementary human rights, even as, irrespective of caste, race, creed or colour, we have certain things in common, e.g. hunger, thirst etc.

19. Would that supreme philosophical truth be of any use in the field of practical politics, to the average Grihastha or householder, seeing that only great souls, who have come to the end of their cycle of Karma, could realize and practise that supreme philosophical truth, and not the ordinary Grihastha, who has only to follow what the Rishis have ordained, and in that following, get discipline which consequently leads to release from birth and death?

No such 'supreme philosophical truth' is involved in the recognition of the simple truth that no human being is to be regarded as untouchable by reason of his birth. The truth is so simple that it is recognized all over the world except by orthodox Hindus. I have questioned the statement that the Rishis taught the doctrine of untouchability as we practise it.

## WHY HARIJAN ?

The other day a friend suggested to me that the word 'Harijan' (man of God) be substituted for the word Antyaja (the last-born) that is being used for untouchables. It was a word used by the great saint Narasinha Mehta, who by the by belonged to the Nagar Brahmana community and who defied the whole community by claiming the untouchables as his own. I am delighted to adopt that word which is sanctified by having been used by such a great saint, but it has for me a deeper meaning than you may imagine. The untouchable, to me, is, compared to us, really a Harijan—a man of God, and we are *Durjan* (men of evil). For whilst the untouchable has toiled and moiled and dirtied his hands, so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him. We are solely responsible for all the shortcomings and faults that we lay at the door of these untouchables. It is still open to us to be Harijan ourselves, but we can only do so by heartily repenting of our sin against them.

*Young India*, 6-8-1931, p. 204

Harijan means 'a man of God'. All the religions of the world describe God pre-eminently as the friend of the friendless, help of the helpless and protector of the weak. The rest of the world apart, in India who can be more friendless, helpless or weaker than the forty million or more Hindus of India who are classified as untouchables? If, therefore, any body of people can



be fitly described as men of God, they are surely these helpless, friendless and despised people. Hence in the pages of *Navajivan*, I have always adopted Harijan as the name signifying untouchables. Not that the change of name brings about any change of status, but one may at least be spared the use of terms which is itself one of reproach. When caste Hindus have of their own inner conviction and, therefore, voluntarily, got rid of the present day untouchability, we shall all be called Harijans; for according to my humble opinion, caste Hindus will then have found favour with God and may therefore, be fitly described as His men.

*Harijan*, 11-2-1933, p. 7

## CHAPTER 17

### HARIJAN *v.* NON-HARIJAN

‘Rather than do constructive work among Harijans, will it not be better to create intense dissatisfaction amongst them with their condition and thus promote such self-help as they can generate among themselves? It is no use your trying to convert the Savarnas.’ This was one of the questions that was asked at a meeting of workers. As it is an important question, it is as well to give the gist of the answer given by me at the meeting. The question betrays ignorance of the whole scope of the movement. To create dissatisfaction among the Harijans can bring no immediate relief to them and can only tend to perpetuate a vicious division amongst Hindus. The object of the movement is to do away with this utterly unnatural division and to secure for Harijans the

simple justice to which they are entitled at the hands of Savarna Hindus. Thus the movement is one of repentance and reparation. Hence it is confined, on the one hand, to constructive work among Harijans and, on the other, to conversion of Savarnas by persuasion, arguments and above all, by correct conduct on the part of the reformers.

*Harijan*, 15-6-1934, p. 140

Untouchability will not be removed by the force even of law. It can only be removed when the majority of Hindus realize that it is a crime against God and man and are ashamed of it. In other words, it is a process of conversion, i.e. purification, of the Hindu heart. The aid of law has to be invoked when it hinders or interferes with the progress of the reform as when, in spite of the willingness of the trustees and the temple-going public, the law prohibits the opening of a particular temple.

*Harijan*, 23-9-1939, p. 280

*Q* : Harijans are legally entitled to send their children to many educational institutions as also to draw water from public wells. But public sentiment still militates against this being put into practice. Should Harijans resort to the law courts for justice in these matters or wait patiently until the caste Hindus are converted?

*A* : Where there is no danger of violence being done to them, the Harijans should exercise their legal right and where necessary, resort to law courts. Harijan workers must continue agitation among caste Hindus and not rest content with mere legal rights.

*Q* : Is it not essential to reform the insanitary methods employed by sweepers for cleaning latrines and scavenging?

*A* : It is most necessary. What is more, until this is done the condition of sweepers will remain pitiable. To this end it is the duty of Harijan workers and caste Hindus to do sweepers' work themselves. No caste Hindu will employ the methods used by sweepers. He will do the work scientifically. For example, he will never remove excreta in a basket or carry it on his head; he will cover excreta with dry earth and remove it in a metal vessel. He will avoid touching dirt with his hands as far as possible; he will clean the vessels with water and a rod; he will bathe immediately after doing the work; he will wear special clothes when scavenging. These reforms do not cost much. They require intelligence, hard work, and love of an ideal. We may not relegate sweepers' work to one particular class. Therefore all should learn it in the same way as cooking. Each person should be his own sweeper. If this ideal were to be put into practice in society, the miserable condition of sweepers would at once be rectified.

*Harijan*, 10-5-1942, pp. 151-52



## CHAPTER 18

### SEPARATE ELECTORATES FOR UNTOUCHABLES

It seems to have been represented that I am opposed to any representation of the untouchables on the legislatures. This is a travesty of the truth. What I have said and what I must repeat is that I am opposed to their special representation. I am convinced that this can do them no good and may do much harm. But the Congress is wedded to adult franchise. Therefore, millions of them can be placed on the voters' roll. It is impossible to conceive that with untouchability fast disappearing, nominees of these voters can be boycotted by the others. But that these people need more than election to the legislatures is protection from social and religious persecution. Custom, which is often more powerful than law, has brought them to a degradation of which every thinking Hindu has need to feel ashamed and to do penance. I should, therefore, have the most drastic legislation rendering criminal all the special persecution to which these fellow-countrymen of mine are subjected by the so-called superior classes. Thank God the conscience of the Hindu has been stirred and untouchability will soon be a relic of our sinful past.

*The Nation's Voice*, 1932, p. 40

I am certain that the question of separate electorates for the untouchables is a modern manufacture of a Satanic Government. The only thing needed is to put them on the voters' list, and provide for fundamental rights for them in the Constitution. In case they are

unjustly treated and their representative is deliberately excluded they would have the right to special Election Tribunal which would give them complete protection. It should be open to these Tribunals to order the unseating of an elected candidate and election of the excluded man.

Separate electorates to the untouchables will ensure them bondage in perpetuity. The Musalmans will never cease to be Musalmans by having separate electorates. Do you want the untouchables to remain untouchables for ever? Well, the separate electorates would perpetuate the stigma. What is needed is destruction of untouchability and when you have done it, the bar sinister which has been imposed by an insolvent superior class upon an inferior class will be destroyed. When you have destroyed the bar sinister, to whom will you give the separate electorates? Look at the history of Europe. Have you got separate electorates for the working classes or women? With adult franchise, you give the untouchables complete security. Even the orthodox Hindus would have to approach them for votes.

[From a speech at the Indian Students' Majlis in London]

*Young India*, 12-11-1931, p. 355

## UNTOUCHABILITY AND INTER-DINING

Inter-drinking, inter-dining, inter-marrying, I hold, are not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy. I do not contemplate under a most democratic constitution a universality of manners and customs about eating, drinking and marrying. We shall have to seek unity in diversity, and I decline to consider it a sin for a man not to drink or eat with any and everybody. These are disciplinary restraints which are not in themselves bad. Carried to ridiculous extremes, they may become harmful, and if the motive is one of arrogation of superiority, the restraint becomes an indulgence, and therefore hurtful. But as time goes forward, and new necessities and occasions arise, the custom regarding inter-drinking, inter-dining, and inter-marrying, will require cautious modifications or rearrangement.

*Young India*, 8-12-1920, p. 4

[The following are extracts from a free rendering of Gandhiji's speech at the Untouchability Conference held at Belgaum during the Congress Week in December 1924:]

I do not regard inter-dining and inter-marriage as essential to the removal of untouchability.

The religion to which I belong prescribes for our observance Maryada Dharma. The Rishis of old carried on exhaustive researches through meditation and as a result of the researches they discovered some great truths, such as have no parallel perhaps in any other religion. One of these was that they regarded



certain kinds of foods as injurious for the spiritual well-being of man. So they interdicted their use. Now suppose some one had to travel abroad and live among strange people with different customs and standards as regards their diet. Knowing as they did how compelling sometimes the force of social customs of the people among whom men lived was, they promulgated Maryada Dharma to help one in such emergencies.

Though, however, I believe in Maryada Dharma, I do not regard it as an essential part of Hinduism. I can even conceive a time when these restrictions might be abolished with impunity. But the reform contemplated in the untouchability movement does not obliterate the restriction as to inter-dining and inter-marrying. I cannot recommend wholesale abolition of these restrictions to the public, even at the risk of being charged with hypocrisy and inconsistency. For instance, I let my son dine freely in Musalman households because I believe he can take sufficient care as to what to take and what not to take. I myself have no scruples in taking my food in Musalman households because I have my own strict rules about my diet.

*Young India*, 22-1-1925, p. 29

Personally I am not sure that inter-dining is a necessary reform. At the same time I recognize the tendency towards breaking down the restriction altogether. I can find reasons for and against the restriction. I would not force the pace. I do not regard it as a sin for a person not to dine with another nor do I regard it as sinful if one advocates and practises inter-dining. I should, however, resist the attempt to break-down the restriction in disregard of the feelings of others. On

the contrary I would respect their scruples in the matter.

*Young India*, 19-3-1925, p. 94

*Q:* Can the members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh refuse to inter-dine with untouchables? Have your views on this question undergone any change?

*A:* At one time I did say that inter-dining was not an essential part of the campaign for the removal of untouchability. Personally, I was for it. Today I encourage it. In fact, today I even go further.

*Harijan*, 28-7-1946, p. 234

## CHAPTER 20

### UNTOUCHABILITY AND INTER-MARRIAGE

Marrying and dining are matters of individual concern. No one has a right to ask another to choose a girl for wife or to dine with anybody against his will. But if a person refuses to take food touched by another person on the ground of untouchability or inferiority, he is observing untouchability. In other words, untouchability cannot constitute any ground for restraint on inter-dining or marriage.

*Harijan*, 23-3-1934, p. 44

Though there is in Varnashrama no prohibition against inter-marriage and inter-dining, there can be no compulsion. It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine.

*Harijan*, 16-11-1935, p. 316

If an educated Harijan girl marries a caste Hindu, the couple ought to devote themselves to the service

of Harijans. Self-indulgence can never be the object of such a marriage. That will be improper. I can never encourage it. It is possible that a marriage entered into with the best of intentions turns out to be a failure. No one can prevent such mishaps. Even if one Harijan girl marries a caste Hindu with a high character it will do good to both the Harijans and caste Hindus. They will set up a good precedent and if the Harijan girl is really worthy, she will spread her fragrance far and wide and encourage others to copy her example. Society will cease to be scared by such marriages. They will see for themselves that there is nothing wrong in them. If children born of such a union turn out to be good, they will further help to remove untouchability. Every reform moves at the proverbial snail's pace. To be dissatisfied with this slowness of progress betrays ignorance of the way in which reform works.

It is certainly desirable that caste Hindu girls should select Harijan husbands. I hesitate to say that it is better. That would imply that women are inferior to men. I know that such inferiority complex is there today. For this reason I would agree that at present the marriage of a caste Hindu girl to a Harijan is better than that of a Harijan girl to a caste Hindu. If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands. That it is most difficult I know from experience. Old prejudices are difficult to shed. One cannot afford to laugh at such prejudices either. They have to be overcome with patience. And if a girl imagines that her duty ends by marrying a Harijan and falls a prey to the temptation of self-indulgence after marriage, the last state would be worse than the first. The



final test of every marriage is how far it develops the spirit of service in the parties. Every mixed marriage will tend in varying degrees to remove the stigma attached to such marriages. Finally there will be only one caste, known by the beautiful name Bhangi, that is to say, the reformer or remover of all dirt. Let us all pray that such a happy day will dawn soon.

*Harijan*, 7-7-1946, p. 213

## CHAPTER 21

### WHO WILL SCAVENGE?

In its inception, untouchability was a rule of sanitation, and still is in all parts of the world outside India. That is to say, an unclean person or thing is untouchable, but immediately his or its uncleanness is shed, he or it is no longer untouchable. Therefore, a person who is to attend to scavenging, whether it is a paid Bhangi or an unpaid mother, they are unclean until they have washed themselves clean of their unclean work. If, instead of being regarded as untouchable for ever, the Bhangi was treated as a brother and was given an opportunity and even made to become clean after performing an unclean service for society, he should be as acceptable as any other member of that society. Corporations can, therefore, lead the way in this matter, but they will not unless the citizens insist.

*Harijan*, 11-2-1933, p. 8

When untouchability has disappeared altogether, it is not feared that Bhangis will refuse to do sanitary work, if they are properly paid and well treated.

Sanitary work is done well enough, if not better, in other parts of the world. But assuming that the Bhangis, on the bar sinister being removed, refuse to do our scavenging, we must be prepared to do it ourselves. The removal of untouchability implies that there is no sin or shame in cleaning for other people, even as it is no sin for a mother to clean her baby or for a paid nurse to clean her or his patient.

*Young India*, 22-6-1921, p. 199

I would advocate bye-laws requiring authorized receptacles, brooms, etc. which would avoid physical handling of dirt, and would also prescribe a simple working costume. Inspectors or overseers will be trained for this humane and sanitary work instead of being expected to exact work anyhow. The result of the present system is maximum of insanitation and minimum of work plus bribery, corruption and bad manners.

*Harijan*, 6-10-1946, p. 340

## CHAPTER 22

### THE IDEAL BHANGI

The ideal Bhangi of my conception would be a Brahmana *par excellence*, possibly even excel him. It is possible to envisage the existence of a Bhangi without a Brahmana. But without the former the latter could not be. It is the Bhangi who enables society to live. A Bhangi does for society what a mother does for her baby. A mother washes her baby of the dirt and insures his health. Even so the Bhangi protects and safeguards the health of the entire community by maintaining sanitation for it. The Brahmana's duty is

to look after the sanitation of the soul, the Bhangi's that of the body of society. But there is a difference in practice; the Brahmana generally does not live up to his duty, the Bhangi does willy nilly no doubt. Society is sustained by several services. The Bhangi constitutes the foundation of all services.

And yet our woebegone Indian society has branded the Bhangi as a social Pariah, set him down at the bottom of the scale, held him fit only to receive kicks and abuse, a creature who must subsist on the leavings of the caste people and dwell on the dung-heap. He is without a friend, his very name has become a term of reproach. This is shocking. It is perhaps useless to seek the why and wherefore of it. I certainly am unaware of the origin of the inhuman conduct, but I know this much that by looking down upon the Bhangi we—Hindus, Musalmans, Christians and all—have deserved the contempt of the whole world. Our villages have today become seats of dirt and insanitation, and the villagers come to an early and untimely death. If only we had given due recognition to the status of the Bhangi as equal to that of a Brahmana as in fact and justice he deserves, our villages today no less than their inhabitants would have looked a picture of cleanliness and order. We would have to a large extent been free from the ravages of a host of diseases which directly spring from our uncleanliness and lack of sanitary habits.

I therefore make bold to state without any manner of hesitation or doubt that not till the invidious distinction between the Brahmana and the Bhangi is removed, will our society enjoy health, prosperity and peace and be happy.



What qualities should such an honoured servant of society exemplify in his person? In my opinion an ideal Bhangi should have a thorough knowledge of the principles of sanitation. He should know how a right kind of latrine is constructed, and the correct way of cleaning it. He should know how to overcome and destroy the odour of excreta and the various disinfectants to render them innocuous. He should likewise know the process of converting night-soil and urine into manure.

But that is not all. My ideal Bhangi would know the quality of night-soil and urine. He would keep a close watch on these and give a timely warning to the individual concerned. Thus he will give a timely notice of the results of his examination of the excreta. That presupposes a scientific knowledge of the requirements of his profession. He would likewise be an authority on the subject of disposal of night-soil in small villages as well as big cities, and his advice and guidance in the matter would be sought for and freely given to society. It goes without saying that he would have the usual learning necessary for reaching the standard here laid down for his profession. Such an ideal Bhangi, while deriving his livelihood from his occupation, would approach it only as a sacred duty. In other words he would not dream of amassing wealth out of it. He would consider himself responsible for the proper removal and disposal of all the dirt and night-soil within the area which he serves, and regard the maintenance of healthy and sanitary condition within the same as the *summum bonum* of his existence.

How may we have this ideal Bhangi? To clothe the Bhangi with the dignity and respect due to him is the especial task and privilege of the educated class.

Some members of the class would first themselves master the science of sanitation to educate the Bhangis round them in the same. They would carefully study their present condition and the causes underlying it and set themselves to the task of eradicating the same by dint of inexhaustible perseverance and patience that never looks back and knows no defeat. They would teach them the laws of cleanliness. Our Bhangis do not today possess even good brooms or other suitable means for the removal of night-soil. The latrines themselves are wretched. The site round the Bhangi's quarters is no better than a cesspool of dirt. All this can only go if some of the educated class give themselves up to the task of redeeming the Bhangi from his present plight and thus redeeming society from its terrible insanitation. Surely this is work enough to satisfy the highest ambition of one who has the spirit of service in him.

*Harijan*, 28-11-1936, p. 336

## CHAPTER 23

### DISPOSAL OF CARCASSES

There are several sections among Harijans, e.g. the Chakkiliyans and Madigas in South India and Chamars in Gujarat, who remove and dispose of dead cattle and eat their flesh. Disposal of dead cattle is a sacred obligation and occupation. But the eating of carrion is a most filthy habit, regarded as one of the heinous sins in Hindu scriptures, and it is essential that at this hour of self-purification our Harijan brethren should be helped to get rid of this habit. But they plead their inability to do so for various

reasons. "It is a habit to which we have been accustomed for ages," they say, "and now it is a positive delicacy which we cannot forgo, anymore than you can do without your finest delicacies. You should also know that removal of dead cattle is an obligation imposed upon us and we may not shirk it without risking the wrath of the Mahajans; you know, perhaps, the carrion is part of the remuneration for the removal. We are thus tied down to carrion-eating for three reasons."

The argument deserves consideration. Written and spoken appeals will be of no avail; we must show them the way out. We should first acquaint ourselves with the conditions obtaining in various parts of the country regarding the removal of dead cattle, and have them altered as circumstances may require; we should supervise the actual skinning and other attendant processes and see to the proper disposal of the remains. The removal must be made conditional on a promise not to eat the carrion, and no one should be compelled to remove dead cattle.

This work demands a fair number of volunteers. They must learn the art of skinning dead cattle in a clean manner and teach it to the Harijans who are doing it today in the old fashion. The carcasses should not be dragged as at present, as it damages the hide and decreases its value. They should be lifted and removed in an expeditious and efficient manner. The hide-curiers will willingly adopt the new method, but not until the so-called high caste people have mastered it.

The way in which dead cattle are disposed of today is most uneconomical and entails a loss of crores



of rupees to the country. Every bit of the carcass must be made proper use of. Much of it is wasted today. The hide, the bones, the entrails and the flesh are all useful and ought to be properly utilized. The hide is being put to use of a sort. The bones are mostly wasted. They should be carefully collected and turned scientifically into manure. The entrails are utilized for gut etc., but there is room enough for improvement. The flesh should be saved from the filthy use it is turned to and must be made to yield fat, which will be valuable for manufacturing grease for factories. The remains should finally be converted into manure or buried deep. If volunteers make a point of remaining present throughout all these processes, the men will easily take to the new departure and will stop eating carrion.

There is nowhere any room for compulsion. Where the hide-curiers are not ready for change, they must be left undisturbed. They are no more bound to remove the dead cattle than the caste organizations are bound to get them removed by them. It should be a matter of mutual adjustment.

But the beginning must be made by the volunteers supervising the processes, wherever, of course, the supervision is not resented. The supervision need not be delayed until the volunteers have first mastered the processes. Actual work will be a training in itself.

Municipalities and local bodies and States can immediately undertake the work of training volunteers in scientific skinning and hide-curing. This does need a little expense on buildings and experts. They should really have a training school for this purpose and

invite philanthropic experts and veterinary surgeons for co-operation, suggestions and help.

*Harijan*, 18-3-1933, p. 3

## CHAPTER 24

### DUTY OF INDIAN MUNICIPALITIES

[Gandhiji wrote as follows in the Fifth Anniversary Number of the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* dated 23rd November, 1929:]

I have been asked by the Editor to answer the following questions for this *Gazette*:

“What can Indian municipalities do in the matter of . . . untouchability?” My answer is as follows:

In the matter of untouchability a municipality can help:

First, by promoting the reform by insisting upon inspectors of municipal schools securing admission therein of a minimum number of untouchable boys and girls.

Secondly, by opening model schools specially for the instruction of untouchable children.

Thirdly, by opening night-schools for grown-up untouchables.

Fourthly, by providing proper housing accommodation for all the untouchables in its employ.

Fifthly, by inducing trustees of temples to open them to untouchables and where this is not possible, by building attractive temples in suitable places, specially for the use of untouchables, but generally for public use, and encouraging the public to make use of those temples in common with the untouchables.

Sixthly, by giving grants to schools, temples, clubs, etc., that would specially cater for untouchables.

Untouchability is, perhaps the greatest evil that has crept into Hinduism. The nearest approach to it to be found in the West was untouchability of the Jews, who were confined to the ghettos. I do not know the historical origin of this disease. Socially it seems to have arisen from the desire of the so-called superior classes to isolate themselves from whom they regarded as inferior. It is the excrescence of Varnashrama Dharma which has been misrepresented as the caste system with which, as seen in the multitudinous castes of latter-day Hinduism, the original four divisions have little to do.

Untouchability in its mildest form takes the shape of not touching or having any social inter-course with the untouchable. In its extreme form it becomes unapproachability and even invisibility. The approach of a man within a defined distance or the very sight in some parts of the extreme South pollutes the superior classes. The unapproachables and the invisibles are very few in number, whereas the untouchables are roughly estimated at sixty millions. In my own opinion this is a highly exaggerated estimate.

Though I regard myself as a staunch Hindu believing in and having great veneration for the Vedas and the other Hindu religious books, and though I claim, not as a scholar but as a religiously minded man, to have made a serious attempt to understand the Hindu scriptures, I can discover no warrant for this brutal doctrine of untouchability in it. Save for a few texts of doubtful authority in the



Smritis the whole doctrine of untouchability is utterly repugnant to the spirit of Hinduism whose glory consists in proclaiming non-violence to be the basis of religion and which lays down the bold formulā that all life, including the meanest crawling beings, is one.

But to a reformer like me this philosophical foundation of Hinduism affords but little comfort in the face of the cruel fact that professors of that religion regard innumerable fellow being as beyond the pale of society solely on the ground of their birth in a particular group of men and women in every way like them.

But this untouchability will soon be a thing of the past. Hindu society has become conscious of the hideous wrong done to man by this sinful doctrine. Hundreds of Hindu workers are devoting themselves to the uplift of these suppressed classes. Among them may be named the late Swami Shraddhanandji and the late Lala Lajpat Rai. These, however, may not be regarded as orthodox. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviyaji, who is accepted by all Hindus as an orthodox Hindu, has thrown in the weight of his great influence on the side of reform. Everywhere one sees the process of emancipation silently but surely and steadily going on. The so-called higher class Hindus are conducting schools and building hostels for them, giving them medical relief and serving them in a variety of ways. This effort is absolutely independent of the Government and is part of the process of purification that Hinduism is undergoing. Lastly, the Indian National Congress adopted removal of untouchability as a vital part of its constructive programme in 1920. It may not be superfluous to add that whilst untouchability is undoubtedly a grave social wrong, it has no legal

sanction behind it. So far as I am aware, there is no legal disability against the untouchables.

The reformer has still a stiff task before him in having to convert the masses to his point of view. The masses give intellectual assent to the reformer's plea, but are slow to grant equality in practice to their out-caste brethren. Nevertheless, untouchability is doomed, and Hinduism is saved. And, as I have indicated above, our municipalities can do much to bring about this salvation.

## CHAPTER 25

### HARIJAN EDUCATION

Common schools and wells should be opened where the existing ones are not available for Harijans either owing to the violent and successful opposition of the neighbours or some other unavoidable cause. Harijans cannot be left uncared for in matters of necessary services till public opinion has ripened. If there is a clearly awakened body of Hindus who have the same feeling towards Harijans as if they were their own kith and kin, they will not wait for public opinion to consolidate itself before taking action. They will do their best to supply pure water and good education to their own newly found kith and kin.

There is one special consideration in favour of opening what may be called preparatory schools for Harijan children. . . . We want every one of these children to learn to live in a clean and decent manner. We want them all to attend the common public

schools. Therefore, preparatory schools for them are an absolute essential if we mean honest business.

*Harijan*, 4-3-1933, p. 4

Preliminary training should consist in teaching Harijan children manners, good speech and good conduct. A Harijan child sits anyhow; dresses anyhow; his eyes, ears, teeth, hair, nails, nose are often full of dirt; many never know what it is to have a wash. I remember what I did when in 1915, I picked up a Harijan boy at Tranquebar and took him with me to Kochrab where the Ashram was then situated. I had him shaved. He was then thoroughly washed and given a simple Dhoti, vest and a cap. In a few minutes in appearance he became indistinguishable from any child from a cultured home. His head, eyes, ears, nose were thoroughly cleaned. His nails which had become repositories of dirt were pared and cleaned. His feet which were laden with dust were rubbed and cleaned out. Such a process has to be gone through every day, if need be, with Harijan children attending schools. Their lesson should begin for the first three months with teaching them cleanliness. They should be taught also how to eat properly, though as I write this sentence I recall what I had seen during the walking pilgrimage in Orissa. Harijan boys and grown-ups, who were fed at some of the stages, ate with much better cleanness than the others who soiled their fingers, scattered about the savings and left their places in a messy condition. Harijans had no savings and their dishes were left thoroughly clean. Their fingers whilst they were eating, were after every morsel taken licked clean. I know that all Harijan children do not eat so cleanly as the particular ones I have described.



If this preliminary training is to be given in all Harijan schools, pamphlets giving detailed instructions for teachers in their languages should be prepared and distributed, and inspectors of schools be required during their inspection to examine teachers and pupils on this head and to send full reports of the progress made in this direction.

This programme involves care in the selection of teachers and the training of the present staff. But all this is well worth the attention, if the Sangh is to discharge its trust by the thousands of Harijan children that are brought under its care.

*Harijan*, 18-5-1935, p. 108

## CHAPTER 26

### HARIJAN WELFARE WORK

It is the obvious duty of Harijan workers to carry on internal reform to the extent it is possible even in the face of the existing state of things.

Harijan workers should, therefore, devote all their energy to:

(i) Promotion of cleanliness and hygiene among the Harijans.

(ii) Improved methods of carrying on what are known as unclean occupations, e.g., scavenging and tanning.

(iii) Giving up of carrion and beef if not meat altogether.

(iv) Giving up of intoxicating liquors.

(v) Inducing parents to send their children to day-schools wherever they are available, and parents

themselves to attend night-schools wherever such are opened.

(vi) Abolition of untouchability among themselves.

Let me go through the items to indicate what is meant by them. A daily bath is necessary at least in our climate, and clean clothes are necessary under all climates. I know that water is not easily available in Harijan quarters. They have, as a rule, no access to public wells and tanks, and they are too poor to afford a change of clothing. It is not generally realized that even a *lotaful* of water can give one a clean bath. This is done by thoroughly wetting a clean towel and vigorously rubbing the body, including the head all over, and then wiping with a dry towel. If the bath is taken daily, the wet towel after wringing out all the water from it can serve the purpose of drying the body. In this climate again, the same clothes can be easily washed and dried there and then, whilst one has merely the *langoti* on.

I know that there is nothing new in what I am saying. And yet I have been obliged to explain these very elementary things to hundreds of workers. Even graduates have been found to be ignorant of these elementary aids to hygiene.

As to the improved methods of scavenging, selfish, ignorant caste Hindus make it well-nigh impossible to remove the night-soil in a decent condition. The closets, because of the untouchability, are unclean beyond description. They are dark, and ill-ventilated, and so constructed that only a portion is somewhat capable of being cleaned, and that too

under filthy conditions. To use these closets is a positive daily descent to hell, but for the beneficent climate many more thousands than already do would find an early cremation owing to the superstitious refusal to see one's own faeces and to permit the untouchables or themselves to clean the interior of the closets. The Harijans who have to perform this very necessary social service can even in the existing unfavourable circumstances, at least have their bath immediately after the cleaning is done, and use plenty of dry earth for cleaning instead of just a little straw that they use.

Being an expert scavenger that I claim to be, I could show many very cheap, efficient and thoroughly clean methods of performing this service, especially if the villagers and city people would help. But I cannot deal with this interesting subject in this cursory statement. The curious may look up my writings on sanitation in general, and village sanitation in particular. Scavengers should wear a professional dress, while they are doing the cleaning work. Every employer or a group of employers can supply such a dress for his or their own scavengers.

Clean tanning is a far more difficult proposition. Our tanners do not know the modern method of skinning carcasses nor of tanning. Tanning, I have here used in a comprehensive sense. The so-called higher classes having criminally neglected this useful body of their co-religionists and fellow-countrymen, the whole of the process, from the carrying of the carcass to the dressing of the hide, is done in a crude manner resulting in the loss to the country of untold wealth and the production of inferior hide.

Babu Madhusudan Das, who is a great philanthropist and has himself learnt the modern processes



of tanning, prepared statistics to show what the country was losing annually owing to the superstition of untouchability masquerading under the name of religion. Harijan workers can learn the modern method and acquaint the tanners with it in so far as it is practicable. The scavengers should be taught resolutely not to accept the remains of the house holders' daily food which are virtually thrown at them in the cruellest manner possible. Years of habit have dulled the aesthetic sense of the scavengers, and they see nothing wrong in eating the remains of another man's dishes. They crave after what they regard as dainties from their employers' dishes. I have known of Bhangis having removed their children from schools because the latter were taught not to touch these leavings and to be satisfied with the *jowari* or the *bajri* bread baked in their homes.

Harijans should be induced to give up carrion and beef. As a vegetarian, I would like Harijans to give up, as many have done, meat altogether. But if they are not ready for this reform, they should be taught to give up carrion as being unhygienic, besides being taboo by the rest of mankind, and beef as being forbidden in Hinduism. I know that carrion is part of the price the tanners get for removing the carcasses. Dr. Ambedkar told me that in some places villagers beat those who had given up carrion, telling them that it was their religion to eat it! The fact was that they were afraid that if the tanners gave up carrion eating they would demand an equivalent price or give up removing dead cattle. Whatever the difficulty, carrion and beef must be given up. That one self-restraint will at once raise the Harijans in the estimation of the caste Hindus and make the task of

caste reformers comparatively easy in the campaign against untouchability.

Items four and five do not call for any remarks. They are self-explained.

The last item is abolition of untouchability among the untouchables themselves. This is an urgent need. Removal of untouchability will become most difficult if this double untouchability is not removed with one sweep. It is an uphill task for Harijan reformers. But if they will realize that this movement is predominantly religious and designed to purge Hinduism of the uncleanness that has crept into it, they will have the necessary courage and self-confidence to carry out the great reform.

It is needless for me to stress the point that workers in such a movement must be selfless and pure in character. I have given here a constructive programme that should satisfy the most ambitious reformer among Harijans and occupy the whole of his time and energy. But there are one or two things he and the Harijans may not do. During this period of grace, at any rate, no Harijan need fast against any one nor need Satyagraha be offered by them. Let them watch the caste Hindus who are on their trial and see what they do to remove the bar that separates the Harijans from them. Let them not engage in quarrels with local caste Hindus. Their behaviour should be at all times courteous and dignified, much more so at this time. Religion can only be vindicated by self-suffering, never by violence done to the oppressors. Though there may be many things they may get by force, their credit will lie in getting their rights by the conversion of caste Hindus. And today they have ample reason

for deriving hope from the knowledge that there are tens of thousands of caste Hindus, who have a lively sense of their guilt and are straining every nerve to do reparation to Harijans. Let them have perfect confidence in the absolute justice of their cause and in the ability of self-suffering to win it.

*My Soul's Agony*, 14-11-1932, pp. 32-36

## CHAPTER 27

### REPLIES TO AN ORTHODOX HINDU LEADER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

[The late Shri Ranchhoddas V. Patwari, ex-Dewan of Morvi (Saurashtra), with whom Gandhiji had become acquainted early in his life and whom he held in high regard, addressed the following letter with a lengthy questionnaire to Gandhiji when the latter was conducting his anti-untouchability campaign from the Yeravda Central Jail in which he had been incarcerated in 1932. Both the letter and questionnaire were written by Shri Patwari in English:]

My dear Mahatma Gandhi

As settled in the course of our discussion on the 7th instant, on the vexed question of the entry of the untouchables into temples, I have framed the following questions with a view to clarify the whole position, in the hope that you will be pleased to answer them:

If I were to stay and see you at 2 p.m. I could not, in fairness, expect you to dictate off-hand the answers, and as you are hard pressed for time, you may take some time. As there is nothing confidential, there is no objection to the questions and answers



being sent to newspapers for publication. I shall feel thankful if a typed copy of answers is sent to me at Rajkot.

Yours truly,  
R. V. Patwari

### Questions

1. You desire that each and every Sanatani Hindu should form and express his opinion on this question according to the dictates of his conscience.

2. Is it not a fact that there are thousands of people who believe that India cannot get real Swaraj without you?

3. Is it not a fact that there are thousands of people who value your life more than what they consider to be their religion?

4. Where was the need of announcing your firm resolve to fast to death if the Guruvayur temple was not opened to the untouchables?

5. Why did you not issue a referendum without taking such a vow?

6. Did not the persons who were engaged in taking votes exploit your vow?

7. Can you correctly ascertain the percentage of voters who voted in favour of the entry on account of your vow before them?

8. If your case is strong and the cause you advocate is just and reasonable, why have you announced your vow to fast to death if His Excellency the Viceroy does not sanction the bill before him?

9. Do you know that this vow is being exploited for nourishing the agitation in favour of the bill being sanctioned? •

10. Are you prepared to give up your vow and issue a fresh referendum in connection with the Guruvayur temple?

11. Before issuing the referendum, did you frame definite rules as to who can rank as a bona fide worshipper of the deity for guidance of your men who were engaged in taking votes?

12. Who can rank as a bona fide worshipper of the deity according to you?

13. Did the persons, engaged in taking votes, ascertain by inquiry which of the voters were bona fide worshippers of the deity?

14. Can you say that a Hindu who does not visit a temple even once a month for *darshana* and who does not pay a single farthing as *bheta* (present) or *samagri* (requisites for worship), can rank as a bona fide worshipper of the deity?

15. If the entry of the untouchables into temples depends on votes in a particular district, the condition precedent is that definite rules should be framed as to who can be treated as a bona fide worshipper.

16. Which of the temples would you treat as public?

17. Your parents were staunch followers of the Pushtimarga, (a Vaishnavite Sampradaya). Did they freely touch the untouchables? Would they allow them to enter into temples?

18. You have never worn the sacred thread, viz. *upavita*. You wore a *tulasi-kanthi* (Vaishnava necklace of *tulasi* beads) when you went to England in 1886. When did you give up that *kanthi*?

19. Are you of the opinion that the wearing of a sacred thread or *kanthi* is not essential for a Santani Hindu?

20. During your stay in England, did you take meals in hotels or in the house of an Englishman?

21. Are you of the opinion that a Hindu does not cease to be a Sanatani Hindu by this?

22. Even now you have no objection to take the food prepared in European hotels or by a Christian or a Mohammedan?

23. Are you in favour of the *priti-bhojans* (inter-communal dinners) in which even the Brahmanas, Dheds, Bhangis, Chamars, Mohammedans and Christians dine together?

24. Will you say that the Hindus who take part in such *priti-bhojans* can claim to be Sanatani Hindus?

25. Are you in favour of inter-marriages between the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas on the one hand and the untouchables on the other?

26. Do you keep any idol or any picture of Shrirama or Shrikrishna when you offer prayers in the morning and at night?

27. Are you a staunch believer in idol-worship?

28. Do you believe that it is necessary to go to a temple for *darshana* of the image for attaining emancipation and for acquiring supreme love for God?

29. How often have you visited the Hindu temples for the *darshana* of the idols during the last sixteen years?

30. What amount have you sent as *Bheta* or *Samagri* to temples from the funds collected by you?

31. Do you believe that a Dhed, Bhangi or Chamar cannot attain emancipation or acquire supreme love for God unless he gets an opportunity to go into the Hindu temples for *darshana*?



32. If you think that idol-worship is essential for the untouchables, what if separate temples are built for them with the idols of Shrirama or Shrikrishna?

33. Do you think that the worship of an idol in a public temple is more efficacious than that of an idol installed in the temple built for untouchables?

34. Has Mr. Kelappan or any Dhed, Bhangi or Chamar told you that he has such supreme love for the deity that he will lose his life if he does not get *darshana* in a temple of the Sanatanist?

35. When you attended the Round Table Conference, were you under the impression that the population of the Dheds, Bhangis and Chamars, who are treated as untouchables, was six or seven crores?

36. Were you under the same impression when you made a compromise with Mr. Ambedkar?

37. Did you even take the trouble of studying the census with a view to ascertain the actual population of these three communities?

38. Is it not a fact that the percentage of the population of such untouchables varies from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 per cent in Kathiawar and Gujarat?

39. Have you even now ascertained the actual population of the three communities in India?

40. Is it not a fact that lakhs of high-caste Hindus who are touchables became Mohammedans during the Mohammedan rule and Christians after the advent of the British rule?

41. Can you give even approximately the number of the untouchables who became either Mohammedans or Christians?

42. Are you for allowing *any* Dhed, Bhangi or Chamar admission into the Hindu temples? If not, what conditions or restrictions would you suggest?

43. Who will frame those conditions and restrictions and who will enforce them? Will this not cause constant bickerings?

44. Has a large section of the Dheds, Bhangis and Chamars authorized you to create this sort of agitation for securing their entry into the Hindu temples?

45. Do you know that most of them are deadly against your agitation and say that it will widen the gulf between them and the caste Hindus, create trouble and make their position considerably worse?

46. Are you prepared to issue a referendum for ascertaining wishes of the untochables in the different parts of India?

47. Assuming that you suggest a compromise and it is accepted by some orthodox Hindus, do you think that it will be held as binding to all the untouchables and other orthodox Hindus?

48. Do you know that the sentiments of untouchability are rampant amongst the Rabaris, Bharvads, Kolis, Thakardas, Kanbis, Patidars, Rajputs and such other castes?

49. Do you know that the Dheds do not dine with the Bhangis and Chamars, and there are separate wells for them in almost all the towns and villages?

50. Can you say with some authority that the Dheds will allow the Bhangis and Chamars to enter into their temples?

51. Have you got a written assurance from the bulk of the Dheds that they will give up such

sentiments if public temples are opened even to the Bhangis and Chamars?

52. You have been preaching constantly touchability after your return from Africa. Will you state the number of temples in the towns and villages which are opened to the untouchables *with the consent of the local Sanatanists*?

53. Do you not think that the Lion of India who once roared and launched non-co-operation movement against the British Government ought not to seek help from His Excellency the Viceroy on this question?

54. You propose to fast to death if the Viceroy does not sanction the bill. Is this by way of resentment against the Viceroy or the obstinate Sanatanists?

55. Do you not think that your identification with the question will prejudicially affect reverence of the Sanatanists for you and practically wreck the Congress and strengthen hands of the British statesmen who are against giving substantial rights to India?

56. Do you not think that the reverence for you is your real strength?

57. Are you prepared to face the human nature as it is?

58. Do you really appreciate the practical difficulties in the way of accomplishment of your desire?

59. Can you suggest a practical way by which public temples may be opened to the untouchables without creating a split or tension among the Hindus?



60. Can the Jains, who are not Hindus by religion, and the Hindus who are against idol-worship, and who have therefore nothing at stake, ask the Viceroy to sanction the bill?

61. Has any of the so-called benefactors of the untouchables built or offered to build any temple for the untouchables?

62. What harm is there if separate temples, having due regard to local needs are built, and the question of the entry into the temples built and maintained by the Sanatanists, is shelved?

63. Have you ever stayed long in places of pilgrimage with a view to correctly ascertain the depth of the religious sentiments of Sanatanists, males and females?

64. Is it not a fact that the heart, and not the body, is the seat of love?

65. Is it a fact that the sacred books of the Hindus lay the greatest stress on the mutual touch by heart?

66. Is it not a fact that it is the lack of mutual touch by the heart which creates wars and disputes among families and nourishes civil and criminal courts?

67. You know that during the dire famine of *Samvat* 1956, numerous Sanatanists fed the needy and supplied clothes? Can you point to a single instance of the untouchables having been denied that benefit?

68. Do you think that the non-touchability of the Hindu women in menses is based on the principle of purity? Does it breathe any hatred for them?

69. Should a Hindu take his bath and wash his clothes if he touches a corpse or any dead creature?

70. You know that among the Parsis the women in menses are treated as untouchables for eight days.

71. Do you know that no pious Mohammedan would go to a *masjid* for prayers if there be a drop of urine or puss on any of his clothes?

72. Supposing that a majority of people in a particular village or town believe that to drink is no vice, should the minority also drink?

73. Are you of the opinion that the Dharma should be defined according to the notions of the majority in a particular locality?

74. Do you know that about 80 per cent of the boys attending schools and colleges, who wear a white Khaddar cap, do not visit temples even once a year, and most of them state that the sacred books of the Hindus should be thrown into the sea?

75. Have you ever advised these boys to visit temples for *darshana* at least once a fortnight or month?

76. Do you not think that if the administration of India be entrusted to the people of such views, they would follow into the footsteps of Russia, whose policy is to make the country Godless?

77. Have you ever cared to ascertain the percentage of boys referred to in Q. 74, who offer prayers to God even once a day?

78. Do you know that the ladies residing in the Vanita-vishram and numerous educated high-caste ladies do not observe menses?

79. Has not Shrikrishna said that dear unto him is one who causes no *udvega* to others? What are your notions about the Ahimsa Dharma?

80. Can you point to two males or females having similar features of the body etc., from the population of 180 crores on the earth?

81. Is it possible to expect all human beings to be of the same temperament or the same habits?

82. Do you not think that the contact of high-caste Hindus with the untouchables in their present state would do considerable harm to the former?

83. All tinctures contain liquor. Would you advise those who take them to take liquor or to give up the tinctures?

84. Can you point to any Rajput ruler following the Buddhistic religion, or to any Mohammedan ruler who had compelled the Sanatanists to allow the untouchables to enter into their temples?

85. Do you think that if the British Government were to violate the repeated sacred pledges of absolute non-intervention in religious matters, it would contribute to their stability and to peace and contentment among men?



86. Does Malaviyaji take meals or do *Sandhya-Gayatri* without taking a bath if he has touched any untouchable person?

87. If the sentiments of the Hindus who support you on this question do not materially differ from those of our friend Mr. Shaukat Ali, is it not open to him to say that he too is a Sanatanist? And can he be our teacher as to what the Sanatana Dharma is?

88. Is it a fact that most of the Dheds, Bhangis and Chamars take beef even now? Do you think that they can be called Harijans?

Poona,  
9-1-'33

R. V. Patwari

**Translation of Gandhiji's Reply to  
Mr. Patwari's Questions**

Yeravda Central Jail,  
11-1-'33

Revered Ranchhodbhai,

I am pained to read your letter. How strange that you write me a letter in English, or you frame such questions as if you want to extract something from a witness who tries to baffle you; but as an elder brother you are fully authorized to do all that. From the interview you had with me, it appears to me that you believe me to be wholly irreligious. Still if God grants you long life, you will admit some day that I have not become irreligious intentionally. Now I answer your questions:

Yours obediently,  
M. K. Gandhi

1. I wish if it can be so.

2. I consider it a heavy burden on me if such be the case.

3. If it be true I shall be much pained. I think it unbearable that any one should give up his belief for the sake of my life.

4. I fully explained my position in my articles on this question.

5. This question is fully answered in my articles.

6. What you believe is not wholly impossible.

7. It is impossible to answer without knowing any one's mind.

8. It is necessary to read my articles for an answer to this question.

9. I have not come to know if any such thing happens.

10. If a systematic referendum is taken and if the Zamorin participates in it and if he enforces whatever the result comes out of it, I shall consider my vow fulfilled.

11. Yes, sir.

12. Those who are entitled to temple entry according to present practice, and those who recognize the necessity of temples.

13. Pamphlets were freely distributed explaining as to who were entitled to vote and the people were relied upon for their honesty of faith.

14. Certainly, if such a Hindu has faith in temples.

15. It is so.

16. Those that are not the private property of any one person or persons.

17. No, sir.

18. I had put on the sacred thread for some time. I have never given up *tulasi-kanthi* but *tulasi-kanthi* gave me up. It was lost in South Africa after wearing it for several years.

19. I do not consider them, to be indispensable features of Sanatana Dharma. I did not therefore try to wear another when my *tulasi-kanthi* was lost.

20. At both places.

21. It is my firm belief.

22. I have no objection if it consists of articles eatable by me.

23. I am against inter-communal dinners as an item of programme for the removal of untouchability, but I see nothing wrong in persons of all classes taking food together prepared according to hygienic principles and served in separate dishes.

24. Those taking part in such inter-communal dinners can be, rather should be, considered Sanatanists if there are other virtues of Sanatanism in them.

25. I welcome marriages between suitable parties if their conduct is pure and if their ultimate goal is self-restraint, but I do not consider inter-communal dinners and marriages as part of the movement for the removal of untouchability.

26. No, sir.



27. Yes, sir.

28. No, sir.

29. I have visited so often in my travels that I cannot say how many times.

30. I had no right to contribute anything to temples from the funds collected by me.

31. I do not at all believe so.

32. I shall not be satisfied with separate temples for untouchables as I do not believe in the class of untouchables.

33. No, sir.

34. No, sir.

35. No, sir.

36. No, sir.

37. I cannot understand the question.

38. Not impossible.

39. I do not know the exact number.

40. I wonder if it be true.

41. I can say that their number is large.

42. Those Dheds, Bhangis etc. who observe the rules of cleanliness must have the right of temple entry.

43. Such rules are obvious, and I consider it easier to secure their observance by Harijans than by other Hindus.

44. No, sir. The present movement is for making other Hindus do their duty.

45. It is the reverse of truth.

46. Your suggestion is acceptable in pursuance of the reply to question No. 44.

47. This movement is not a commercial bargain. It is religious. It is religion for those who practise it.

48. It is our misfortune.

49. It is our another misfortune.

50. If I can convince the caste Hindus, it is quite easy to persuade Dheds and others.

51. Many have given me their assurance. I have nothing in writing.

52. I believe about 500.

53. I cannot answer this question without committing a breach of the pledge given to Government.

54. The answer to this question is included in the answer No. 8.

55. I do not believe so.

56. Whatever strength is in me is Rama's. Nothing is mine.

57. I have passed my whole life in this way.

58. I believe I am fully aware of difficulties.

59. I have given my suggestions.

60. No, sir.

61. Yes, sir.

62. By doing so, Sanatana Dharma itself would be harmed.

63. Yes, sir.

64. True.

65. Yes.

66. Quite true.
67. It is not worth mentioning.
68. It is proper. There is no hatred in it.
69. It is necessary to be pure.
70. I have heard so.
71. It is true.
72. Never.
73. Whatever be the definition, what is acceptable to the majority will be religion.
74. I shall feel wonder and pain if it is true.
75. No, sir.
76. I do not harbour any such fear.
77. All pray to God at least once for the most part.
78. I do not know.
79. I have answered this question in my several articles.
80. No, sir.
81. No, sir.
82. If high-caste Hindus are really high, their contact with Harijans will, instead of harming them, profit them and Harijans even. If they are devoid of the heart about which you asked a question before, they will profit by contact with Harijans because this is a matter of heart.
83. I shall advise giving up tincture.
84. It is not within my knowledge.



85. No, sir.

86. This question can be addressed to Malaviya-ji.

87. I am unable to conjecture what Maulana Shaukat Ali would say.

88. I know they are not all beef-eaters. All can certainly be Harijans.

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